

ROB'S

Volume 1, Issue 3 May, 1993

I M A  
G I N  
A T I O N

*Editor's Note:*

I'm sure you've all had it happen before. For the longest time you would see something, and you'd think, "How does that work?" You'd really like to know, but part of you doesn't because it might ruin the way you view it. For example, if you ever see a really good card trick, chances are you won't want to know how it works because, if it was good enough, it is just like magic.

I've tried to point this out to people before, and one day I told my friends that I believed cars were magic. They are, to me. If anyone was to even try to ask me how any part of a car worked, I'd have to tell them it was magic. Because in my mind, there is no way that that many mechanical parts can operate simultaneously and produce the motion that cars make. It's impossible in my mind, no matter how anyone tries to explain it. It's just plain magic.

However, my friends just thought I was trying to be silly (I wonder where they got that idea), and for the rest of the conversation they tried to come up with things that were more magical than my car analogy (ie. Microwaves, because when you put food in it the food comes out hot, but the air isn't).

However, my original statement stands. Some things are magic. In fact, I'm not just talking in the sense of not knowing the physics or mechanics or whatever behind it, but there is really a thing in this world called magic. It exists everywhere, and it exists at all times. It's more commonly known as work.

Seriously. If you spend enough time on a project, there is no true way to determine exactly where it came from. This magazine, for example. This magazine is not by any definition of the word mine. In fact, I can't even say the ideas in this text I'm typing here are mine (everyone and their brother has claimed some of the things I've claimed at one point or another). Some of it is yours. Some of it is your friends. Some of it belongs to people that have been dead for three hundred years that I never knew. But in the end not a bit of the ideas have been original, or creative.

So how is it magic? Because I choose to write them now. Why did I choose to write them now? I don't know. I had planned a completely different Editor's Note when I sat down at this computer today. But when I got to typing, this came out.

The magic is not in us, or in what we write. But it is us, and it is how we write. Or, in some cases, how we draw, sculpt, etc. Anything. All of it, a product of everyone, everything, every little thing we've seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and felt. Not a bit of it belonging to us. Every bit of ours.

This magazine is magic. I could never tell you where my personal work or magic begins and ends, because a lot of you have more say in it than I (I'm just the Editor, after all). That makes it more magic. This book is magic because all of us, some of who don't even know each other, some of us who don't even think they'll even know each other, have all chosen to pool their own magic, their ability to call on the past and create a somewhat original piece of art. That makes us magic. That makes us special. That makes us all a part of this unusual magic that none of us can ever explain.

Well, wasn't that incredibly deep?

Well, up this issue we've got plenty of things to raise your interest. Déjà Vu and friends are back, and this time there's some actual action! And of course, the sequel that was never meant to be, When Men Go Buggy II. Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the universe.

In this issue, we have another heart stopping (literally) episode of the up-chuck killer. You guessed it, D. O'Dorant is back. Rosanne Scott has a great music review again, plus a story, a poem, and plenty of art (check out the cover)! In addition to that we've got all the regular submitters, plus a whole bunch of new people. Can you stand the excitement?

Again, it is unfortunate, but Durghar, Fate Into The Unknown, The Adventures Of Spare-O And Red Cardinal, and Teresa's Untitled novel could not make the deadline due to circumstances that are, honestly, beyond my control. (I know Buck and I kind of sluffed off on the last installment of Spare-O, and now we don't even have one, but it's really not our fault.) Maybe next issue (if I can drag a submission out of us lazy people).



In addition to that, technical difficulties have made it impossible to print Brandon's art, his story, and S. Eller's poems, and Steven Todd's stories. Unfortunately, I'm not at liberty to divulge why (I'll give you a hint: A New Magazine Is Coming).

Robb P. Wolfard and R. Stephen Howard gave me a lengthened version of their fabulous poem, "Seaping," and I just had to print it. It is really, really good. So if you think you've read it before, that will explain the sensation of Déjà Vu. So if you think you've read it before, that will explain the sensation of Déjà Vu.

I must say that the art this issue is very good, but one picture in particular stands out in my mind (mainly because I requested it). If you look carefully on page seventeen, you'll see Catherine Reaksecker's rendition of my stupendous super-hero, The Animator! Honestly, that is one of my ideas that she drew for me. I bet you can't guess his powers!

By the by, will someone please draw a picture of Déjà for me? I'd like that, because I can't draw. If you do, I'll print it in the next issue.

I've got nothing better to do with my time, so I'm holding a contest. I don't, however, think I can offer much as a prize, so the results might not be as good as I would like them to be. Here's how the contest goes.

After I read a few pieces from a book called Flash Fiction, which is a collection of very, ver short stories, I wondered how short a short story could really get and still have some kind of plot or point to it. So, I figured that since I'm not the best person to answer that (since I have a limited amount of writing of my own to deal with) I thought that if I held a Shortest Short Story contest, I might be able to satisfy my curiosity and get some people interested.

So here are the rules. You, the reader, will submit like you normally do for any story, the Shortest Short Story. First off, the story must have either a) a definable plot, or b) a definite point to it. Length will be determined but word count above all else (physical length will not score you points). I will examine all submissions and the winner will receive an extra copy of each issue up to date of the extremely famous and highly acclaimed Bob's Imagination. In addition to that, your story will be printed first in the next issue, and we will print any or all of your material that you want us to print in future issues. Now how's that sound for a prize?

Bob has finally got a home! On May 1st, the day after my birthday, my brand new computer (appropriately named Dexter) went on line, becoming the first official home of Bob's Imagination. No longer will I have to borrow computer time off of Rhonda Turnquist or my mother's 286. No longer will a five and a quarter inch disk be the home to your writing. No longer will I have to show the vaccination papers for every known virus to people who think my disk has Michelangelo. Bob has a home! Yeaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!!

Uhm, we're kind of desperate, so we would like to make a special request for cover art. Anything you can stand to give up that will be on the cover of every copy will work (if you have a design idea, please tell me and we can work something out).

I'm fresh out of stuff to say, so I'll sign off. But before I do, please send me some more submissions! And maybe a letter if you've got the time. I'm desperate!

This is Austin Rich, and I'm outta here!

### *Special Thanks To:*

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. for their niftier than gravel ad

The Bob's Imagination Staff:

Kelly Ballance for her wealth of material,

Rosanne Scott for her smashing music reviews,

Tim Hadley, that fun loving freshmen,

Devin Miller, super-thief, extrodinaire,

Damon Brice for his outstanding novel

All of our regular artists,

Anyone else who has spent over an hour assiting me (that includes especially Jennifer Stump),

And my cohort and co-editor, who is probably laughing at me somewhere for some reason which will become clear to me sooner or later.



**This issue is dedicated to Heidi Gunter, Editor of The Wordsmith (our sister magazine), whose support of all writers over the last few years has inspired me, and others, and without her teaching we would all probably be sitting at home rotting our brains on MTV instead of reading this highly intellectual magazine.**

## Bob's Imagination

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Cover Design, Art & Text Layouts by <i>Austin Rich</i>	

## Déjà Vu: One More Time

by Austin Rich

“So James, how long you been working this job?”

“Listen Frank, I’m only going to say this one more time. Talk only when spoken to, or when you have something productive to say. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir!” Frank said. It appeared that his trainer was in no mood for small talk.

They continued walking for quite some time, until they reached the end of a hallway where another intersected. On the wall across from them there were two doors. One marked Men’s. The other, Women’s.

“Okay. Even if this is more of a minor detail, it’s still important to check the bathrooms. Sometimes, crazy people will hide in the stalls with who knows what for their intentions. That’s the entire reason we even sweep the building. You check the Women’s room, and I’ll take the Men’s. Do you understand?”

Frank nodded in comprehension.

James turned and entered the Men’s room.

Inside the light was on, which was of no surprise. James looked to his left and saw a camera moving back and forth, with whole bathroom in its view. Everything, except the stalls.

James began the routine of opening the door, checking to see if there was anything or anyone that did not belong, and closing the door.

James did this for the first four of the five bathroom stall doors. However, when he got to the fifth door a strange feeling came over him. He shrugged it off, and opened the fifth bathroom stall door.

James entered the Men’s room.

Inside the light was on, which was of no surprise. James looked to his left and saw a camera moving back and forth, with whole bathroom in its view. Everything, except the stalls.

James began the routine of opening the door, checking to see if there was anything or anyone that did not belong, and closing the door.

James continued to check the first four of the five bathroom doors. However, when he got to the fifth door a strange feeling came over him. He shrugged it off, and opened the fifth bathroom stall door.

James entered the Men’s room...

Déjà Vu took one last look at the night watchman before he stepped out of the Men’s room. Déjà smiled a very satisfying smile, and muttered something about a vu loop.

Déjà approached the Women’s room carefully. It took an enormous amount of willpower to set up the vu loop for the first guard, so he decided to just take this one out the old fashioned way. Besides, Déjà had no way of knowing where the guard was going to be anyway.

Vu took the direct approach this time, walking right in as if he had intended to. This did not go unnoticed by the night watchman, but it left him very puzzled. For one, men weren’t supposed to be in the Women’s room (however, this reasoning only confused him more because he then tried to come up with a logical reason why he was in the Women’s room in the first place). The second reason this startled him was because the man he saw was wearing a black leather jacket, boots, sunglasses (in the middle of the night, no less), and was carrying a staff that looked as if it was made of some fairly sturdy wood and, if his memory served him correctly, would hurt if it made contact with his body.

Fortunately, he had the perfect phrase to say in such situations.

“Uh, you’re not supposed to be in here, I think.” Frank flinched to himself after he said this, because that was not at all what he intended to say.

Déjà, however, was not going to make the same mistake.

“Oh. Then this must be the Women’s room. I’m sorry, I always get those two mixed up.”

Frank was even more puzzled by this statement, and by the fact that the man he was now looking at was getting closer.

Frank slowly began to realize that the man approaching him was not in here by some accident, and was, more than likely, the kind of person that he was supposed to be looking for, and, if he could send the message to the nerves in his arm fast enough, he should try to stop this man at all costs.

Frank reached for his gun, managed to pull it from the holster, and then drew a complete blank as to what to do next.



Déjà, on the other hand, did not. He quickly brought his staff up from where it was, and it connected where he intended.

The last thought that went through Frank's mind was, "My memory obviously served me."

As much as Déjà enjoyed that, he had no time to dilly dally. He had a mission to complete, a special mission at that. One that he was only capable of completing, and one that will probably be talked about in every household in the United States for the next one hundred years and, more than likely, be considered the second most unusual event in American politics since the founding fathers wrote the Constitution.

Vu was hired to perform a government coup on the United States of America.

Déjà Vu ran quickly down the hall, since the body of the second guard was going to be discovered sooner or later, the first guard was probably going to get out of the loop sooner or later, and that would alert the entire to building of his presence a good amount of time before he had intended to.

Eventually, he saw an elevator, and next to it was a door marked stairs. Déjà quickly opened the door marked stairs, and pushed the up button on the elevator in one swift and graceful movement. He then began to cautiously work his way up the stairs.

At the exact instant he set foot on the stairs, a room in a far off corner of the White House began to have a rather annoying noise become audible, which alerted the entire contents of the room of the fact that a person that did not belong in the White House was attempting to use the elevator; things were working exactly as Déjà had intended.

By the time he reached the top of the stairs, Vu could hear the to-busy-to-notice-that-someone-had-opened-and-closed-the-stairway-door security guards were trying to figure out why their almost Government-proof Security system had gone off when there was obviously no one in the elevator. Déjà waited patiently for them to conclude that it was some kind of mistake, and they all went back to the room whence they came.

After fifteen minutes had passed (plenty of time to get them all settled at their posts) Déjà opened the door at the top of the stairs and set off yet another alarm.

Déjà wasted no time with silly games, and went straight to the president's room where the president probably was. However, the large guards outside the door were going to pose a problem.

Déjà managed to hit one of them with his fist, which threw him off guard. The second, however, was able to land a blow at Vu's side, where a sharp crack indicated to Déjà that this guard was not to be taken lightly.

Déjà brought his staff up from under him, hitting the guard in the side of the head. This knocked him off guard, and gave Déjà the extra time he needed to get up and plan what to do next. He side ached tremendously, and it was obvious that something was broken.

The guard pulled a pistol from somewhere, but Déjà managed to knock it away with his staff. Left with few options, the guard dove toward Déjà. Déjà Vu had anticipated this, and was able to jump out of the way in time for the guard to hit his head on the wall, this time knocking him into an unconsciousness that would be satisfactory.

The first guard, however, took this moment to aim and fire at Déjà, at which time the pain in his back legs caused them to buckle and collapse. Angered, Déjà pulled his staff in the general direction of that guard, which knocked him down as well, and knocked the gun out of his hands.

Déjà grabbed the gun and proceeded to shoot him in the legs.

"Now how does that feel?" he yelled. He was no longer in a playful mood.

The door the guards were guarding opened, and the President saw something that rather startled him. Déjà pointed the gun at him and said, "Help me up. I've had a bad evening." The pool of blood Déjà was lying in said it all.

The President called his wife, and they helped Déjà to a chair, all the while Déjà was complaining and warning them to be careful, while the gun was still pointed at the president.

The First Lady, fortunately, knew a little first aid, and knew enough to try to remove the bullet. Intense pain shot up Déjà's leg, and he immediately put a stop to that line of thinking.

Déjà then asked for two things.

"Mr. President. Do everything that I ask you to do and in five days I will leave and you can go about your business as if none of this had ever happened. Don't, and you die and the V-P will be given the same ultimatum. It's your choice."

"Why should I allow you to do that?"

“Because, in some way, I should be awarded for being the first person to successfully break into the White House and live this long. And in another, all I plan to do is hire one man into a position that is no longer filled anyway, so there is, basically, nothing to lose. What do you say?”

The President thought for quite a while. “I’ll agree on the terms that you allow my wife and children leave, you allow me to have Security guards watch you twenty-four hours a day, and that you tell me the exact nature of everything you plan to do in advance, and in great detail.”

The pain in Déjà’s leg clouded his better judgment, but, as he had pointed out before, he was lucky to even be alive.

“Only if after all of this is over and done with, that I get to go free. No arresting. Like I said, everything will be as it was.”

“Reluctantly, I’ll agree.”

The Security guards and Secret Service men picked that time to show up. The President quickly managed to whisk them away, saying something to the effect of, “He went that way.” He closed and locked the door.

“Well, now that the deals have been made here are the first things I’ll be needing. Someone who knows first aid, and a phone.” Déjà was relieved to find that he had, indeed, pulled it off. The entire last two minutes had been, in his mind, the most difficult of his life.

“What do you need the phone for?” asked the President.

“I need to let my wife I’ll be home late.” Déjà sounded almost sincere.

The President reluctantly brought him a phone. He said, “What are you going to tell her?”

Déjà pulled out a receipt from his pocket from some previous purchase in addition to a pen, and scrawled out two sentences quickly, and gave the piece of paper to the President as he dialed.

On the second ring a tired hello was heard.

“Fields.”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“You start in two days.”

Déjà hung up the phone.

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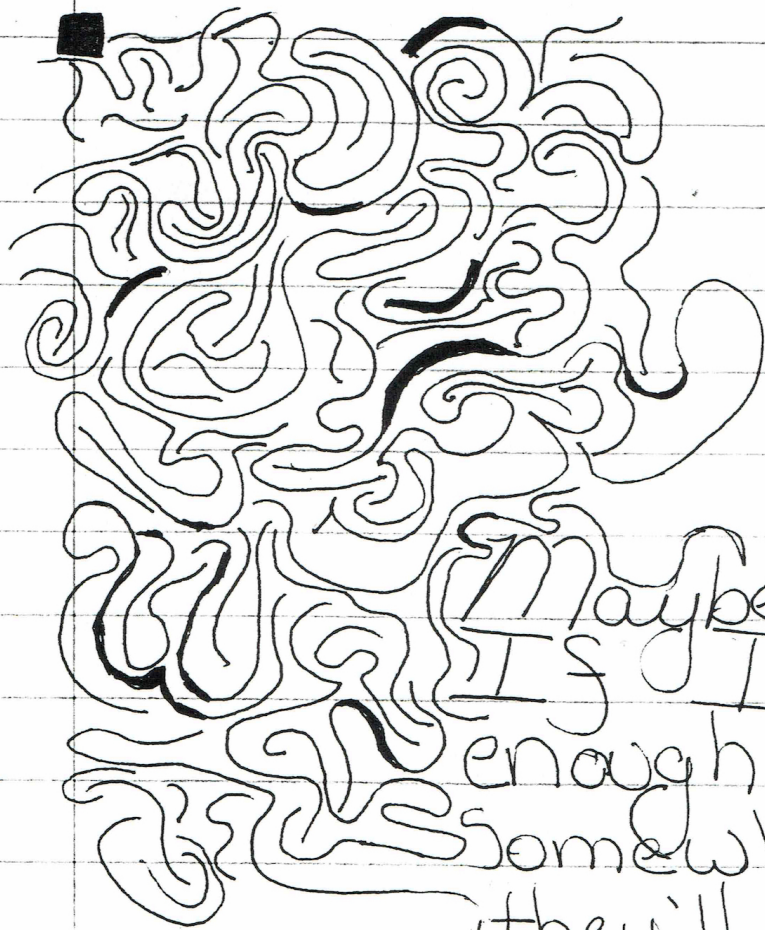
### **Alive**

by Kelly Ballance

Sun setting on an ocean of fire.  
Waves rushing up a sandy beach only to retreat to their mother  
the Ocean.  
The wind blowing through the grasses  
and your hair.  
The birds singing their goodnights and thank you’s to God  
The smile upon your face and the love in your heart  
they threaten to burst your very soul with  
joy.  
Is this the only time you ever feel alive  
this is the only time you are happy to be alive.  
Soon the sun is gone and all that is left is you

### **Valentines-** by Patti Kelly

A cupid floats around and  
shoots  
all of those idiotic  
love-sick fools  
as romance rings through  
the air and flowers bloom  
and roses stink up the  
springtime  
and out in the sunshine my cat  
eats the  
birdies.



Maybe,  
If I draw  
enough lines,  
Somewhere  
they'll meet.  
Like you and I,  
Confused and lost,  
All jumbled up

- by T.J. Belknap

**FIRE**  
**(Ashes to Ashes)**

by Ron Horner

(For those who understand this... I salute you)

© 1993

Flames aroused  
By your presence  
Death to come to you

Your struggling...  
In the pits, surround you...  
Fire, Fire, FIRE...

Burning  
Smoldering  
Frying in your brain

Opening...  
Beneath your feet  
Flames are reaching through

Boling of your blood  
Has you thinking true  
(The time has come)

It's time to die  
It's time to die  
It's time to DIE...

Truth is coming...  
Into presence...  
IGNITE THE FLAME

Reaching to your soul  
Reality is none  
You know it's time to die,  
you know the time has come

Villages,  
Children,  
Dying by the flame

Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire  
Fire

The walls are coming in,  
Flames burning in sin,  
Ashes in the bin...

Fire...  
Fire...  
Fire...

Death...  
Misery,  
Demise

Ashes to ashes  
Dust to dust  
I hate to do this  
But I must, I must  
Ashes to ashes,  
Dust to dust  
I hate to do this,  
But I must, I must  
Ashes to ashes  
Dust to dust  
I hate to do this,  
But I must, I must  
Ashes to ashes,

**Learn**  
by Melissa Cooper

Nothing.  
That is what I want to feel.  
No problems.  
No responsibility.  
Nothing.

I don't want to die;  
That would defy my sense of right.  
It would leave problems for my friends.  
And it wouldn't solve anything.  
Life would have won.  
I want to win!

Running away, is just giving in.  
But sometimes it sounds so good.  
Just run, never stop,  
As long as my friends are with me.

My life isn't hopeless.  
Sure, I have problems.  
Everyone does.  
I haven't quite learned  
How to deal with them yet.  
But I'll learn.  
I always do.



## **Dark Lessons**

by Josh Minter

The darkness surrounds us,  
cutting off our sight of the world.  
As we sit in the dark we are all equal,  
no one is different.  
Everyone is the same size and color,  
no one is ugly or beautiful.  
We can all be in one room,  
and still feel alone.  
For we are separated by the Dark veil.  
If all are silent,  
then no one hears.  
We begin to believe that we are separated and alone,  
even though the next person is only a few feet away.  
There is plenty of time for reflection,  
thinking is easier in the dark.  
In the dark we learn to like others on personality alone,  
It's too bad we spend so much time in the light  
Light can give us insight on the world around us,  
It can show us the beauty of all things,  
too bad it can't teach us to appreciate the beauty  
yet if we forget what we learned in the dark.  
We will have trouble learning it in the light.  
It's too bad we forgot.

## **Goddess**

by Rosanne Scott

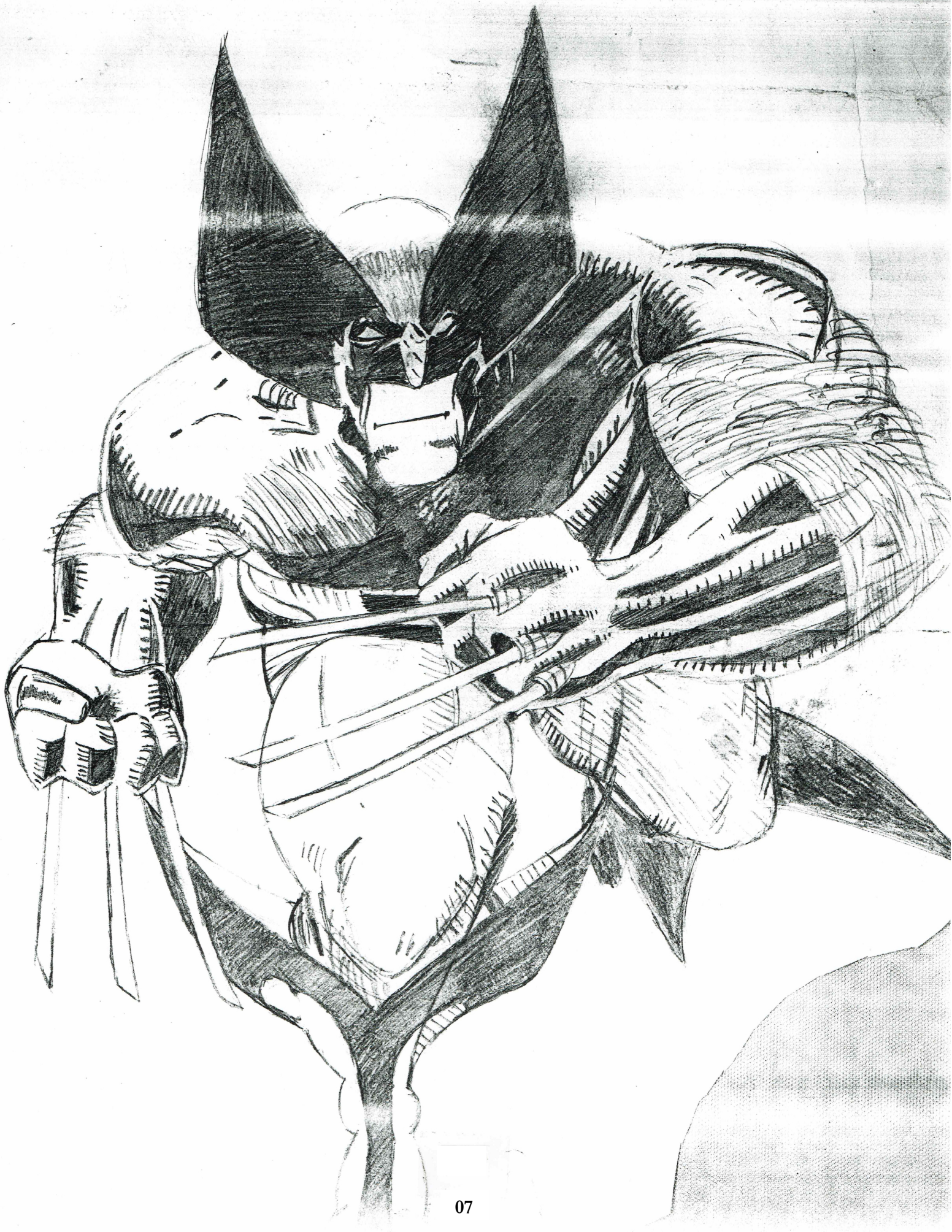
Smile upon me  
Oh beautiful,  
Pale angel  
As she dips her  
Head with hair  
Like silky strands of  
Satin.  
Brushing my eyelids with  
Fingers  
Lithe and graceful...  
Lulls me to sleep  
In the soundless, sweet  
Abyss that is time eternal.  
She floats down on gossamer wings  
Silent  
Beautiful.  
She is Death...  
And she is all things.

## **Time**

by Kelly Ballance

The moon and the stars  
do they smile upon your countenance while  
the ocean sings along with birds  
its voice a soothing whisper.  
the sand sifts through your fingers  
and your thoughts run deeper than the great night sky  
this you wish you could tell  
would the world finally be at peace?  
or would it call for the shedding of blood to shake its never-ending thirst.  
time passes and so will you  
someday the hate will be gone but when that time comes your body  
will be a part of the earth and your soul will watch from the great  
heavens above.







**Adrian**  
by Austin Rich

Part II.

She awoke. She remembers a dream. One of a little girl that died young, and yet was not completely dead. She was not sure why she dreamed this, but isn't that the whole nature of dreaming sometimes? She then went back to basics. She remembered the washrags, and things were back in focus.

She had been here before. The rags take her here when they want to. They do it once a week, or so. She can't really remember. All the days of her life seem to blend into each other now, and she can't remember anything specific anymore. Time has no meaning. She also couldn't tell if where she was was in a dream, or if it was a real place. She remembers coming here before and talking to the washrags, but not as washrags. But in what they called their natural form. They would tell her things, things she didn't understand. But she didn't need to. Because they would always tell her "Someday this will all be over, and we can stop doing this. You can become who you were." She keeps waiting for that day, although she's not sure if she wants to. She can't remember who she was anyway.

She waited like she does every time they call her here. She knew they would come, sooner or later. In the meantime she looked in all directions, into nothingness, and wondered where she was. She came here often, but didn't know where, or what, this place is. It didn't consist of any real substance, because she couldn't touch or feel anything. In fact, she wasn't even standing on anything either. Stretching in all directions was deep bands of colors, most of them ranging from dark lavender to light violet. It was a beautiful sight, in fact more beautiful than anything she can ever remember. She wished everything was like this sparkling, endless nothingness. But that was just not possible, since she could only come here or see this when the rags call her.

As she sat... floated and waited she tried to remember again. Remember what her other life was like. It must have been wonderful, she would think, but she didn't really know. But she was, to say the least, longing for a break from the repetition. While she was thinking, the rags finally came. But they did not look like rags, they were almost like the background of where she was. The purple colors in the background was untouchable, and seemingly infinite, to say the least. But the rags in their current form were bright, almost white, and opaque. She could have reached out and touched them if she wanted to. But she didn't. She wouldn't want to, and couldn't because of the respect she had for them.

There were twenty of them here, but she knew there were more elsewhere. She had more washrags than that, and she had seen sixty of them in one sitting before. Not all of them inhabited washrags. Some stayed here in the, whatever it was called.

The leaders's name was Haraq. He wasn't in control of the other one's though, but he was the "packs" advisor, so to speak. One thing she noticed about the rags is that they had funny names. Two of them, Sp't and Spat, claimed to be brothers, but they didn't have a mother. Wart, and his brother Nik, are always slandering their cousin Sput, something she didn't exactly like. Lysos seems to be a poet, the romantic, although he, along with the rest of them, claim to be emotionless. But if you were to hear Lysos's poetry just once, well, you'd understand. Dar-vid is insane. But he has right to me. Once upon a time, Darn and Vid, best friends, denied logic and claimed that energy was mass and mass was energy, which was their proof that they were actually mass beings. They spent years working on this, and one day decided to join their minds to increase their thought processes and get the job done quicker. The result, Dar-Vid, a being that contradicts it's own existence. In perpetual change, Dar-vid often gets into deep theological discussions with himself about the universal importance of fingernails. Xak is another one of her friends, whose name is short for Xakerandervoilphone. Xak is not crazy like Dar-Vid, but it is very difficult to talk to Xak. He has an obsession with abbreviations, and sometimes only pronounces the first few letters of each word he speaks.

The other rags have completely different personalities, like all the rags she knows, and yet they claim to be emotionless. But some of them don't talk to her often, or not at all. T'rk, S'tp, Asap, Bile, Jik, Cyt (who is continually finding new variations on the pun, "Anyone need a place to cyt?"), Bil, Lith, and Plud are some of the other washrags she has been acquainted with.

But one of her closest friends is Eos. Eos was different than any other washrag she has ever met, because for some reason, he is an outcast from the pack." Eos is the only washrag that could "wear out" a body, hence the old and tattered rags hanging ominously from the walls in her room. Eos is an adventurer, and he explores the world outside of the house. But through his explorations, Eos would "wear out" the washrag body he was using.

When she found his body, she took his body and hung it on the wall, and had a small funeral. The other rags later told her that Eos was not dead, just that his body had died. She thought that if it was only his body that died, that if she laid out another washrag Eos would be able to inhabit it. After she did this, Eos returned and thanked her in his own way. He massaged her feet and back. She didn't know why she liked this, but she did. Eos has gone through twenty different "bodies" since she has known him, and his latest is on its last leg. Eos now considers her as his friend, as does she him. For this, and other reasons, Eos is considered an outcast, because friendship would require emotion, and emotion is not their way. Not at all.

Haraq always leads the discussions that take place in this, just named by her, Purple Realm. He is a being of pure logic. He never says anything without reason, and never seems to engage in anything without reason, and never seems to engage in anything unnecessary. He speaks in a friendly voice, one that you could listen to and trust always. But the apparent logic behind his words are so vivid, it was quite obvious that he was the "brains" of the outfit.

He said, "We have summoned you for what might be the last time. Then, you can return to your other life, the one you had before we met you." He said some other things that she could not understand. But she didn't worry. She knew he wasn't going to hurt her. He never has. And besides, she could see Eos behind him. Not that she could tell it was him, they all looked alike. But for some reason, she believed it was Eos, and that made her feel better.

"...by stimulating the pleasure centers of your brain, we can cause you to enter a happy dream-state..." etc., etc.

When he was done she spoke.

"Haraq?"

"Yes?"

"Could this really be the last time?"

"There is always that possibility. Why, do you not like these times we are sharing with each other?"

"No, I like it. These times make me feel good. Like when I talk to Eos." Haraq said nothing. "But I'm curious as to what my other life was like."

"But is that not what defines life itself? The state of not knowing some things, and striving to learn them?" Haraq looked at her, knowing that she would probably not have an answer.

"I'm not sure," she replied, "I've never really learned about it. Is that really the definition of life Haraq?"

"That is something you will learn, in due time. I am ready now, are you?"

Hesitantly, she said "Yes," in a quiet whisper.

\* \* \* \* \*

This is one of the times she enjoys in life. She had never been able to remember any other thing other than this, and Eos's massages, that make her feel good. She does like reading the Mickey Mouse magazines, but it's not at all the same. This is different, and wonderful.

She doesn't exactly know what Haraq is doing. But when he does it, she almost goes to sleep. She is aware of the things around her, but it makes her feel like nothing describable anywhere. It is the closest thing to a place she has heard about called heaven that she knows of. But when Haraq does it, something is different. It feels good, but not as good as when Eos gives her a back massage. She doesn't know why, but maybe she would know in her other life.

She thinks about these times when people bother her. She doesn't like it when people bother her, not even when they mean to be nice. Maybe she's afraid that they will hurt her when they touch her. There is something unpleasant about people touching her. She doesn't know why. But even talking bothers her sometimes. Maybe because she doesn't believe in the phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Why she doesn't believe it, she does not know. There are a lot of things she does not know.

She ... floated silently, thinking of all the good thoughts she could. She didn't have many, and that's what made them so special. Maybe she had more in her other life. So many maybes. This time felt like all the others she could remember, and was almost boring when she looks back at it. But that few moments that made her feel good were worth it, at the least at the time. But now it was over.

She floated silently for a few more moments, then opened her eyes. Haraq was still there, as was Eos, or who she thought was Eos. In fact, none of them had moved. They floated, silently, and watched her carefully.

"So what is the news, Haraq?" she inquired, enthusiastically.

"Please, we are unsure," was all he said after a long pause.



“So now what?” she asked.

“You must wait in your room,” again, after a long pause.

And she did.

\* \* \* \* \*

She opened her eyes, this time in her room. it was dark out, she could tell because the dull sunbeams were no longer on the wall. She watched the washrags, but none of them stirred. She sat and thought about what Haraq had said. He had only paused like that one other time, which meant that this could be the last time. But then again, maybe he only pauses like that occasionally, and it really doesn't mean anything. She didn't get her hopes up, and sat in thought while a lone washrag in the corner of the room became active. He crawled up toward the bed, and looked at her until she noticed it.

“Oh, hi Eos. How are you?” she said in a blase manner.

“I am fine. Just as well as the last time you asked me. How are you? You sound like something is wrong.”

“Well, I just don't like sitting here and waiting. I have a feeling it's all for nothing, and this won't be the last time.”

Eos looked concerned. He wanted to make her feel better. “You know, I heard that it is good news from Plud. And you know Plud, he is rarely wrong.”

She looked up for a second, then frowned and said, “You just want to make me feel better. Thanks for trying.”

“Is there anything I can do you help you, anything at all?”

She almost retorted with an interesting language she remembers called sarcasm, but she didn't know how to use it effectively or correctly and decided to merely say “No.”

She turned and laid down on her stomach after removing her shawl, and grasped her pillow, and began to think again. Eos took the liberty of giving her a back massage. She didn't say anything at first. She just let her mind relax. After he was done, he went back to his corner.

“Thank you,” she eventually spoke in a very friendly, apologetic tone.

“No, thank you.”

The washrag pile was beginning to become active, and she sat up and awaited to hear what they had to say. She suspected it would be the same as always.

“Are you ready to hear the, what you call, news?” inquired Haraq.

“Well...”

“As you have heard, it is good news.”

“It is?” she said, excited.

“Yes. We are done, and ready to go home. You have been a big help to us in getting back home. I extend my most sincere thank you.” He said it very calmly, as if he's said it a thousand times before. she had never heard it before, and it was shocking.

It took her several minutes to say anything to him.

“Haraq?”

“Yes?”

“Where will you go? I mean, why couldn't you get there earlier? And why did you need my help?”

“I understand that you have many questions; they should all be answered, when you return to your old life.”

“But how will I get back?”

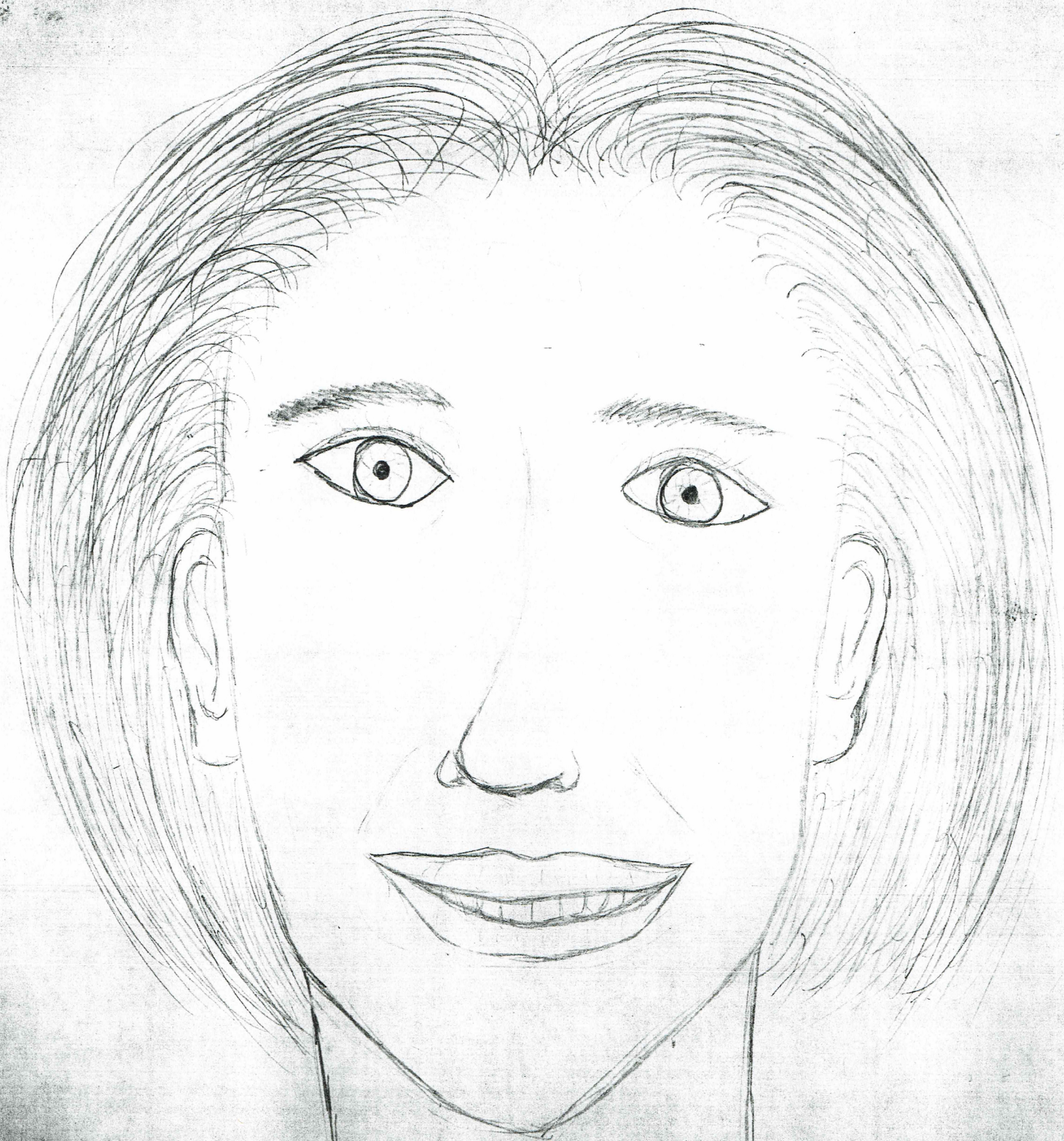
“Just click your heels three times and say, “There's no life like my old one. There's no life like my old one.”“ laughed Dar-vid.

“Please, clam down Dar-vid.” Then, almost in a whisper, and directed only toward her, he said, “I will help you remember your old life. Just place me on your head, and it will all come back to you.”

With an unsteady hand she reached out and snatched him, and quickly placed him on her head. Nothing happened at first. She sat, and almost began to worry. Then, in a sudden tidal wave of images, ideas, words, sounds, and smells, she remembered it all.

*To Be Continued...*







## Light Labyrinth

by Becky Munsell

A bright white light split the darkness in a blinding flash and a small boy staggered away. Rubbing his eyes, he called out softly to anyone who might have been there to hear.

He looked up, his eyes wide and staring, and began blinking at the source of the light. It was a blinding ray from an undefined source on the invisible ceiling. The whole room was light. No walls were visible and the floor was of simple white stone.

The small boy stood there, blinking in confusion and gazing around in shock. He was a small boy, no more than eight or nine. Small boned and dark, his skin was an olive tone that seemed to absorb the surrounding brilliance. His hair was deeply black, and it gleamed with a bluish cast in the fierceness.

He sniffed disorientedly and then sneezed as if he were allergic to the light itself. He itched at the white cotton tunic that hung loosely on his frame. It blended effortlessly into the white of the room, making the boy appear to be only a disembodied head, neck, arms, and legs.

Frowning thoughtfully, he walked toward the area of the floor, which the light source appeared to be directly above, looking studiously at the floor before him to lessen the glare.

After a while he noticed the light directly above him. He did not glance up, knowing that it could easily blind him here. He kept on walking, his eyes now searching the endless white in front of him.

After a time, he came to realize there was something wrong with the light here. But acknowledging this fact and knowing what was wrong were two totally different things. But then it hit him, literally.

With a surprisingly loud thud the boy struck the wall and staggered to the floor. He sat there, dazed, and shook his head. After several moments he stood and reached out to the wall that was so white it was indistinguishable from the light in the room. It was this act that told him what was wrong with said light.

As his hand stretched toward the wall he realized he was casting no shadow at all. His child's mind noted this and moved on, the fact holding no significance at all.

The wall appeared to be made of the same stone as the floor, seamless and smooth. With one hand trailing on the cool surface, he walked along the inward curving wall, wondering if there was a door somewhere.

His footsteps echoed hollowly through the chamber, muffled by his bare feet. He went on walking and walking and walking until he knew nothing of reality. Only the disjointed slapslapslap of his feet falling upon the stone. He fell into a dazed trance, and kept plodding heedlessly through the light.

Slowly, after many hours, he stopped, his clouded mind coming to the realization that the chamber was so uniform that he would never be able to tell if he'd been past any particular place.

He began to chew on one rough thumbnail with thoughtful deliberance and yelped when he bit some of the surrounding tissue. The sound echoed garishly through the chamber before it ceased.

He stared wonderingly at the deep crimson blood that was welling from the tiny laceration. It was the only thing besides his skin that disrupted the whiteness of the unknown chamber.

Looking at the cut he smiled and raised his thumb to his mouth. He bit down harder this time, tearing away more skin and squealing at the pain. The fresh blood dribbled from the new wound. He repeated the act, until blood flowed liberally from the torn thumb.

Smiling again, he went on walking, his bloody hand dragging harshly on the stone, leaving a smeary trail.

He walked on and on until at some point collapsed exhaustedly and lay there, his eyes open. There was no point in closing them, for the light shone straight through. He slept hectically, the light glaring even in his dreams.

When he awoke he sat up and looked at the wall above him. The previously red streak had dried to a rusty color. Looking back down at his hand, he apologized in a scratchy voice to his thumb and tore it open once more. The blood began to flow again and he stood, once again trailing his bleeding appendage against the wall.

He slept twice more before he came to the place he had first smeared the blood. Collapsing against the wall he slid to the floor, rubbing some of the rusty splotch on the wall off onto his tunic.

Lying there, he looked down at his throbbing hand and placed his thumb in his mouth. He sucked on it idly for a moment and then grimaced and spat out a splatter of blood. The bitter, coppery taste disgusted him, but also, he realized with revulsion, excited his shrunken stomach. Shaking in disgust he turned away and retched up a small glut of yellowish-green stomach fluids into a small puddle.

Standing, the young boy stumbled toward the center of the empty cell, crying hoarsely. He collapsed there, directly under the harsh light's source and sobbed uncontrollably for several moments. For the first time the boy

began to wonder where he was and why he was there. He had been to strange places before, but nothing like this. Why had the Masters told him to 'send' here? He was alone and frightened and hungry. Usually they had him 'send' someplace hospitable. From there he would learn the needed information, await the 'call' and 'send' back.

Closing his eyes he did the forbidden. He tried to 'send' himself back before the 'call'.

He was a Sender, for lack of a better term. One of the few beings in the universe who could fold space and time and travel unimpeded through other dimensions and versions of reality. He was a Sender they rarely used though, for he was forever trapped in the body and mentality of an eight year old boy. Therefore they assumed he could be easily persuaded and used against the Masters.

With a moan of despair, he jumped to his feet. He stomped the ground in hateful frustration and screamed his eight year old's outrage. He thought he knew why he was here.

The Masters had decided that a child Sender was too dangerous to the security of the Council. They'd had him 'send' to a interdimensional vacuum. Easy enough to enter but nearly impossible to escape from.

They'd had him 'send' here to die. It was a place where they could forget about him. If he ever happened to 'send' back they could write it off as an accident.

Crying in despair, the small Sender curled into a ball and focused all his energy. He began to probe the chamber. Not only the stone, for matter in any state is easy to 'send' through, but also on the temporal shield around the place where the dimensional fabric was loosely woven or better yet, a few key strands broken, perhaps he could free himself.

After an indeterminable length of time the boy's face lit with joy and excitement. His body disappeared with a sharp pop of air rushing into the void his exit had created.

A bright white light split the darkness in a blinding flash and a small boy staggered away. Rubbing his eyes, he called out softly to anyone who may have been there to hear.

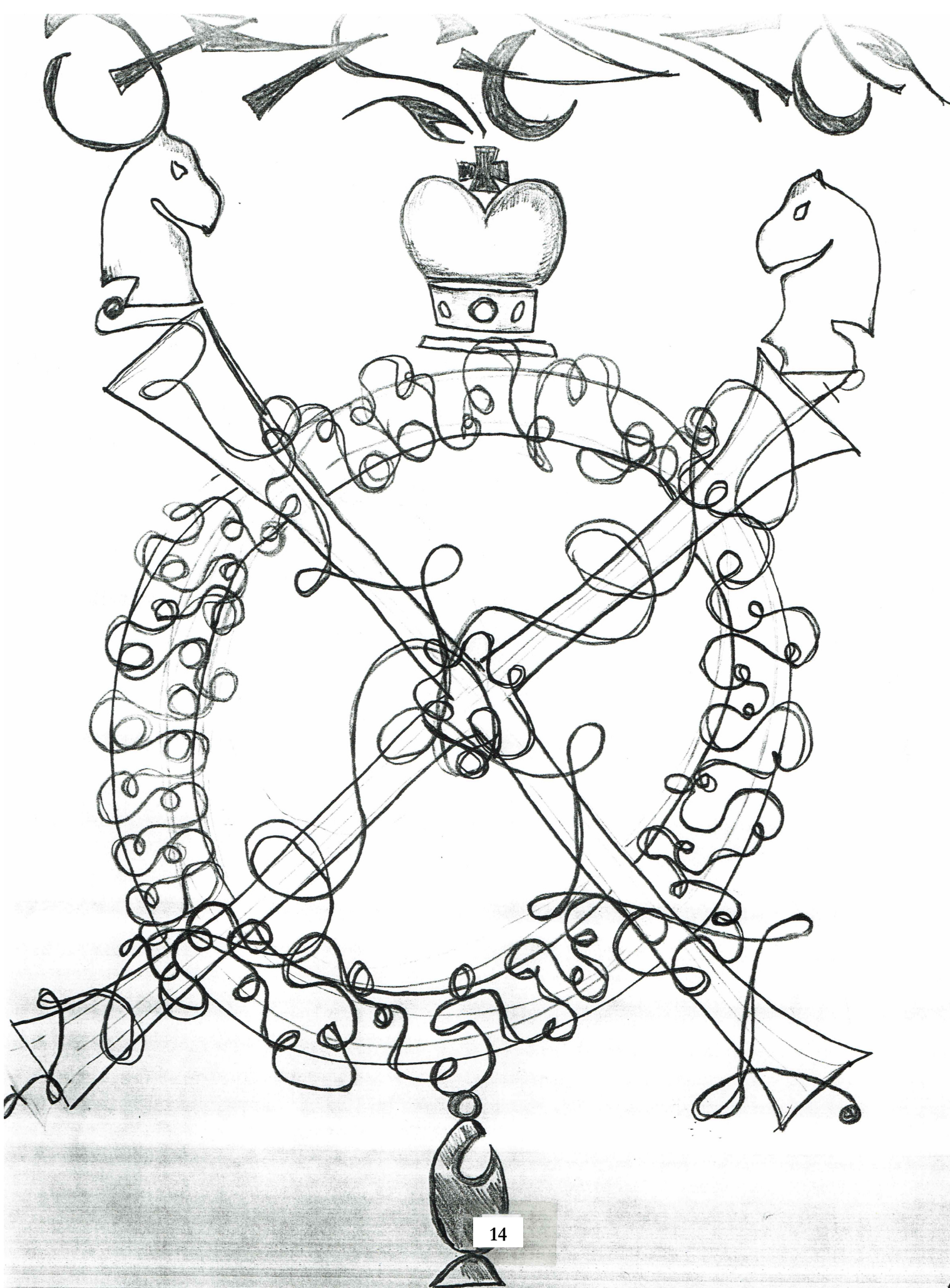
He looked up, his eyes wide, and he howled, knowing that it was not one trap, but many chained together, each more difficult to escape from than the last.

## **The First Punch**

by Josh Minter

Mike was sitting in class, waiting for the last bell to ring. He couldn't wait for track practice. He was a sprinter on the team and he loved to run. The teacher was going on about some History lesson; Mike didn't even know what it was. He was too busy concentrating on the rest of his day. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the bell rang. He got up and went to his locker. Mike talked to a few people along the way. When he got to the locker it was already open. His locker partner Tony was standing there talking to his girlfriend. Mike threw his books into a duffel bag and locked the locker. Then he grabbed Tony by the arm and dragged him from his girlfriend and to the locker room. They got into shorts and tee-shirts and went into the Gym to wait for the coaches. When they entered the gym they found a large number of guys playing basketball. Both of them quickly joined the game. As the game was breaking up one of the guys got scratched by something. No one knew what. Just as Mike sat down Brian (the guy who got scratched) walked up to him and accused Mike of scratching him with his fingernails. Mike argued that his fingernails were too short to scrape him. Brian, however, didn't listen. Instead, he hit Mike in the face, knocking his glasses to the floor. Then Brian did something stupid: he turned his back on the guy he had just hit. Mike wasted no time in tackling Brian from behind. For five minutes the two traded punches until Mike grabbed Brian's head and slammed it into the bleachers, then threw him to the ground. Mike was so pissed off that he walked away without looking back until an unknown kid ran up to him with his glasses, which he tried on only to find that the frames were broken. Brian did not get up until Mike was gone, and he never again did anything to bother Mike.





## and tyler was his name

by Rebecca Leichner

i knew a boy and tyler was his name tyler had no family he had a mother and a father but they were not his family because they didn't love him and he knew how they didn't want him and he knew how they didn't care about him he wanted to run away from everything and go live with the animals he wanted to swim free in the river and not have to hear their screams of anger and see his mother cry he swore to himself that he would never treat anybody like they treated him he said he could never hurt anyone like that so tyler ran away he left his parents and went to the bridge he looked at the water and saw his reflection and he knew he was no one he knew he didn't matter to anyone then tyler fell very far into the water he didn't try to hang on to the bridge he just let the weights in his pockets pull him to the bottom of the river where he could be with the fish and the salamanders and no one would ever have to worry about tyler again and no one did worry about tyler again after that because tyler went away and no one knew where he went and nobody really cared because tyler had no family and no one that loved him.

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## The burning

by Kelly Ballance

As the figure burned it seemed to cry. The wax and plastic melted, dripped, and ran together. They formed a puddle and left a blackened scar on the concrete. It had looked so real, before we burned it. I remember thinking it was red. I remember thinking that I wasn't the only one here, that I wasn't the only survivor of the holy war. I remember thinking I wasn't alone, then after all this time, here was another. It had seemed so alive, but after I called out to it, after I had screamed at it, when it hadn't answered, when only the thick silence answered me, I think I knew. I was angry, angry that this thing, this still figure had fooled me into an emotion I had forgotten. Hope. I was infuriated that this Statue, this dead Statue, had done this to me. I threw the fire at it, maybe deep down inside I still had hope. But it didn't move, it didn't scream. I know now there is no hope. I sit in silence, here in this world when I am the only one. Here where I am alone.

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## Music Reviews

by Rosanne Scott

The Lemonheads' new release, It's A Shame About Ray incorporates more singing and melody than their earlier releases. This album is making a name for itself among the "alternative" and Top 40 crowds as a great mix of catchy bass lines, thrashy guitar riffs and enigmatic lyrics.

A nice addition to the band is bassist Juliana Hatfield. She plays bass [duh] and sings backup for singer/songwriter Evan Dando. David Ryan rounds out the trio, doing an excellent job on those drums.

It's A Shame About Ray has one song on it that's not written by Dando; "Mrs. Robinson". Originally written and performed by Simon and Garfunkle, The Lemonheads remade the 60's classic for an anniversary tape of The Graduate, starring Dustin Hoffman.

I've heard the original version, and the Lemonheads' take on "Mrs. Robinson" is much better. It's retro, but with a 90's twist.

This album has unusual, quirky lyrics. Take a snatch from "Bit Part" for example: "I want a bit part in your life/ a walk on would be fine/ I just want a bit part in your life/ rehearsing all the time/ little more than a stand-in/ I won't need reprimanding".

This album isn't very long--it runs about 16 minutes on each side. The songs are pretty short also--sometimes as short as one minute, 58 seconds. It's enough to make a person say "I wish there was more!!"

All in all, I loved this album. Ever since I've had it, I've listened to it non-stop. Looks like Lemonheads fever is sweeping the school, because everyone I know has asked to borrow my tape.

The best songs are "Rockin' Stroll", "The Turnpike Down", "Confetti", and, of course, "Mrs. Robinson".

If you like Juliana Hatfield, you can catch her on her first solo album, Hey Babe.

## Campground

by Tim Hadley

You are driving along the pale, gray highway in your red jeep. The road seems like an intruder to the peaceful serenity of the lush evergreen forest and flowers on the side of the road. You have been driving for two hours now, trying to escape the confusion and hassles of everyday life. For the past year, you've been waiting to get away from civilization, and you've taken every chance there is, whether it's listening to the ocean on your Walkman while working, or putting up your painting of the forest in your office. Anything you could do to escape.

"I'm so glad I found that campground," you think to yourself. You still can't believe how it happened. About eight months ago you were driving along in the rain, coming home from another of those long meetings, when you started hearing the noise in your engine. You had known your jeep wasn't new when you bought it, but it had kept getting worse and worse. These stops were getting routine now, so you immediately started to look for a place to turn off. You saw the sign on the other side of the road saying "Campground." Hopefully someone there knew how to fix cars. Then you saw the road leading to the campground. The gatekeeper had let you in for free because the man in the store was an auto mechanic before he retired. You told yourself and the gatekeeper and store owner you'd go back every chance you got, and you have.

Now you're coming to the part of the road that you've come to enjoy the most. One more curve in the road leads you to a hill. As you are climbing up, the snow-covered mountain beyond your turn-off comes into view. When you reach the top, you can see into the fir-covered plain below you. Except for the mountain in front of you, there is not a blemish to the fir encrusted horizon. As always, there are no cars on the road. This would seem lonely if it weren't for the anticipation of what is coming soon. You think you see the blue shimmer of the calm still waters of the lake in the distance, but you can't be sure. You tip the peak of the hill, and the mountain, the plain, and everything disappears from view as the evergreen forest closes around you once more. Finally, the road on the right leading off to the campground. As you turn off the highway, you feel the forest closing around you. With a small turn of the road, the highway, along with the rest of the 'civilized' world, disappear. One more turn takes you to the toll gate and the smiling face of the man you appreciate so much.

"So, you've come back again? Has it been a month all ready?" His smile always made troubles dissolve like a bad nightmare. "Well, welcome back." He reminds you of your grandfather when you were only six. The picnics on the banks of streams, Christmas with all the relatives, and the quiet moments alone while he would read your favorite stories. As you pay the toll, you think of how appropriate a sign would be that said, "Welcome to Serene Lake. Please leave your troubles at the gate."

A gradual curve of the road leads you to the twenty-car parking lot. You don't know why it's so large. Of course, by city standards, it wasn't big, but the most cars you've even seen in the parking lot were six, and one of them belonged to the gatekeeper and one was the store owner's. Their cars are the only ones there now, the old, green metallic car of the gatekeeper, and the brown truck of the store owner, sitting next to each other, like they've always been since the beginning of time. That reminds you; you haven't said hello to the store owner yet. He told you on your second visit here that if you ever come back, you had to go in and say hi. He even said that he'd make you one of his delicious picnic lunches. Your mouth is watering for one of his sandwiches, so park in your usual spot, right next to the stream, and walk across the parking lot to the store.

There he is, sitting in his old leather chair behind the counter, where was when you first saw him, and has been every time you've come in. "Welcome back! I've been hoping you would come back. I sure hope you got here all right."

"Good to see you again," you say as you shut the door. "I'm back."

"I bet you want one of my lunches," he says, like he's reading your mind. He gets up and walks over to the refrigerator and pulls out an already made picnic basket.

"Well, no one makes them like you," you explain, as your eyes follow the basket to the counter. "How did you know I was coming?"

"I had a hunch, and this is the fourth weekend of the month," he says, while he rings up the lunch on his old fashioned cash-register.

"Well, I'll see you later," you say as he hands you the basket. You leave the store as he sits back in his chair and waves good-bye.





Outside on the wooden porch, you try to decide where to go. The last time you came, it was raining, and so you had to sit in your car for an hour, eating your lunch. This time you want to go to the picnic area. You could probably find your way there to your favorite table blindfolded, if needed. Yours is the best, in your opinion. It's also the only one completely secluded. That's what you need. Just a place to relax, enjoy your lunch, and be close to nature's resplendence.

As you walk off the porch, you take a left through the part in the hedges. This always seems like walking into a room to you, for the trees above you and the wall of shrubbery on two sides gives the picnic area a feeling of isolation. This still isn't *your* place, though. You continue on, through an edge of the grassy field, where there are sometimes a couple of kids playing tag on the slight hill, throwing a Frisbee around, or wading through the small brook that runs everywhere in the campground. Finally, you reach the section of bush that isolates your table from the rest of the world.

A small opening in the shrub lets you into your private picnic table. In front of you the table stands, on the edge of the stream. Beyond that, the forest of your painting at work. On the left, the hedges surround a pine tree that shelters you from the rain, sun, and wind. To your right, beyond a couple of trees is Serene Lake, one of the calmest lakes you've ever seen. Logically, for a lake that size, there would be a stiff breeze blowing during the day. You've never seen more than a gentle breeze here. About five miles away you can see the snow-tipped peak of the mountain, its hard rocky black slopes and the soft gentle white snow on top. What a great place to relax and eat.

After lunch, it's about time to go set up your camp. You walk back to your jeep, get in, and start the engine. You drive out of the parking lot, past the path to the picnic grounds, and onto the loop of campsites. The interesting thing about the loop is that it sticks out into the water. The lake is always to your left, no matter where you are on the road.

You begin to look for your campsite. There go the restrooms, site one, site two, site three, and on and on until you are almost back to the parking lot. Finally you reach the best one of them all, the site you stay in every time you come, campsite nine.

The first thing you hear when you reach it is the stream that runs through it. Your campsite is small, about twenty feet by twenty feet, but there is still room for the stream to meander through. You get your tent out, walk across the single-log bridge, and begin to set up your tent.

After that is finished, it is about time for dinner. You walk back to the parking lot and into the store. Inside, you see two figures, one of the store owner and one of the gatekeeper. They are talking and laughing when you walk in, and you can't wait to join in.

"Oh, hi," the store owner says to you. "Looks like it will be just us three for dinner tonight. So, what will it be?"

For the next hour or so, you listen to the tales that the two men have picked up through their lifetimes, from old Indian legends to the story about how the gate keeper decided to give away half his fortune to buy this land. You contribute a few yourself, and by the time the sun begins to set, you are all laughing and having a great time. You only say good-night so you can go to look at the sunset at your picnic table.

You arrive there just as the mountain becomes very brightly colored from the reflection of the sun going down. You can't see the sun, for it is behind you, but you can see all the brightness because of the silhouetted mountain. In the morning, you can see the sunrise, but for now, all you can see is the glowing peak. The sun is making a brilliant sunset tonight. This is how you have remembered it, just like last time. You could stare at this for hours, but, like always, the sun finally goes down completely, and the mountain grows dark. This is almost sad, but then something else catches your eye.

Rising up in the air is the moon, pale white in the growing darkness. You never believed the stories of the man in the moon until you came up here. In the reflection in the water as well as the actual thing, you can see the smiling face of a man. He's looking down on you, and almost seems like your guardian. He almost looks familiar, almost like the store owner...

A gentle breeze coming from the lake brings you back to reality. You shiver as the moist chilly night air reaches you. You yawn and realize how late it's getting. You must have been staring at the moon for longer than you thought. Oh well, time to go back to camp.

You walk back through darkness, for the trees overhead block out all light from the moon, but you've done this so many times, you have developed a sixth sense about this trail. You can dimly make out the outlines of the trees and such, and so you make it back to the parking lot without incident. After you are there, you follow the road back to your campsite.

It seems dark and cold, but you get firewood out of the back of your jeep and a fire takes care of the loneliness. You stare at the fire for a while, and then you grudgingly get up, go over to your tent, unzip it, and get in. You zip it up slowly, seeing your campsite, the golden fire, and the shimmering stream for the last time tonight. This time is the most magical part of the day for you.

You get into your sleeping bag, and stare at the roof of your tent, the fire outside making great, distorted shadows everywhere. Outside, you can still hear the sharp crackling of the fire, the gentle, soft breeze shifting through the branches of the firs, and the lively bubbling of the meandering brook.

Tomorrow, you think, I will go fishing or boating or listen to the tales of the store owner or maybe hiking or swimming...

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### Seaping

by Robb P. Wolfard & R. Stephen Howard

Shadows from the never-ending  
Raging for a way  
Never wanting to know, the secrets of yesterday

Talons of the ever-ready  
Claws of the powers ones  
Can you stop me  
Can't you hear me  
Warring just for some

They take my hands and tie them together  
They take my mind, myself forever  
Talking to no one.  
Wondering why  
Ripped apart  
Inside I cry

Flying everywhere  
The land is creeping  
Through my fingers  
My world is **SEAPING**

People of fast descending  
Telling you what to say  
Never waiting, to find out if today is to stay

But you see the writing  
Showing what I said  
Now the chaos threatens you  
Even though you've read

Talons of the ever-ready  
Claws of the power ones  
Can you hear me?  
Can't you stop me  
Kill the land your from

Standing, running  
Always weeping  
All around havoc reeking  
Pain, suffering their seeking

As I run... the gutters Seaping.

### In My Head

by Melissa Cooper

The page I used to look upon  
was filled with words--  
Words that meant something,  
to everyone but me.

The thoughts I had,  
the words I wrote,  
they weren't reflecting  
anything I knew.

Now, with my head full of ideas,  
new concepts, new feelings, and lies--  
Now, is when the page falls blank.

My head is full, as is my heart,  
But the page, it stares hatefully at me,  
Full of contempt for me and my notions,  
Not letting me get words on to paper.

Now that I have  
words that mean something,  
words that I know--  
Now they won't come.

Maybe it's not the paper  
or the pen--  
Maybe it's in my head.

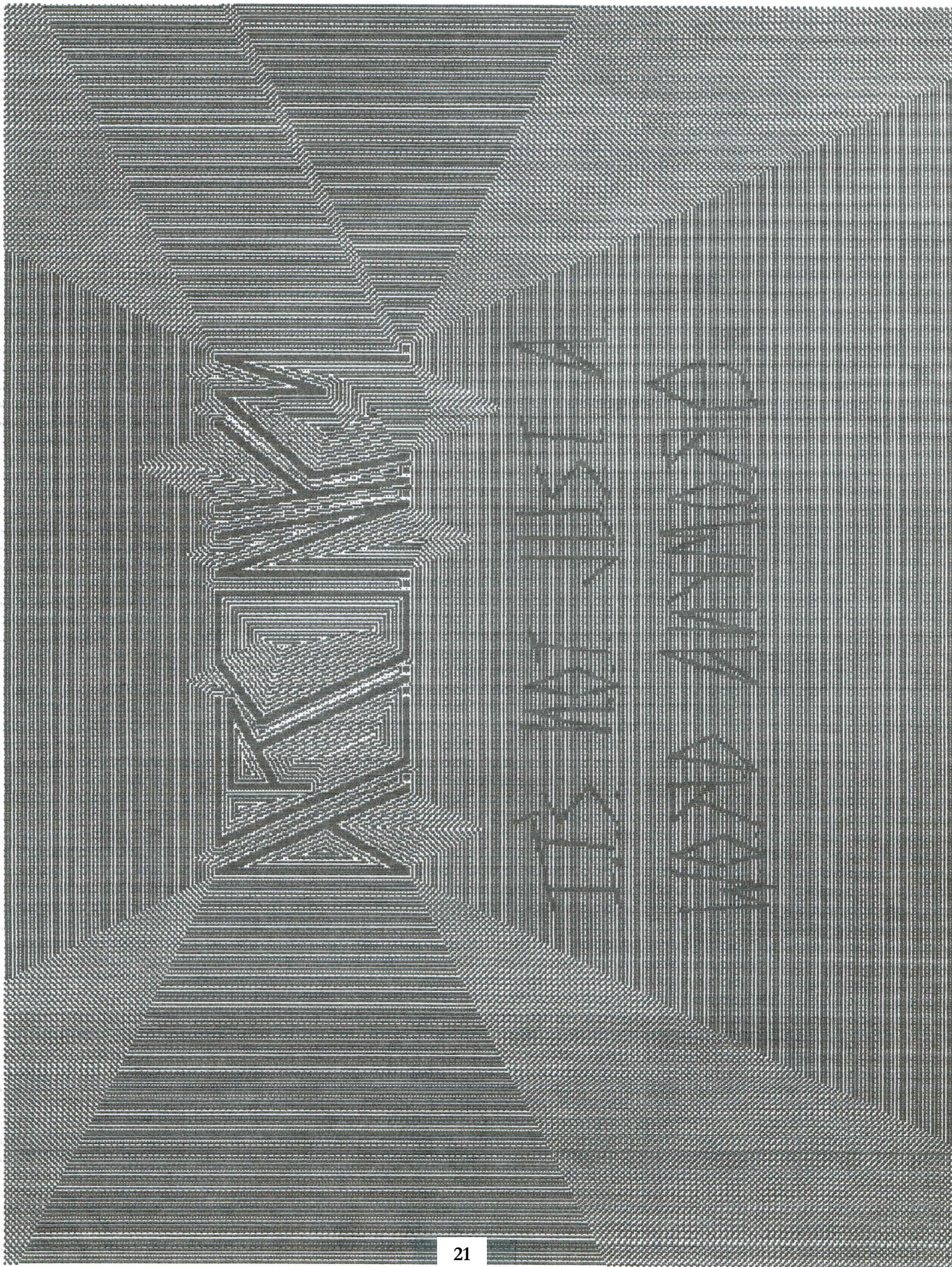


**King**  
by Kelly Ballance

king of the gods,  
king of the stars  
king of stones  
king of the ocean  
king of mountains  
king of love  
king of sin  
king of the light that burns within  
king of hate  
king of time  
king of reason  
king of rhyme  
king of now  
king of then  
king of women  
king of men  
king of life  
king of death  
wilt thou steal mine very breath?  
wilt thou take what is mine to have?  
even though tis you who gave  
are you true?  
are you evil?  
what be thou that are so holy?  
must we agree?  
must we obey?  
in spite of all you take away  
make us clean,  
make us pure,  
for this hate we must endure  
out of love  
out of faith  
we see with your eyes,  
with the turn of the sun  
with the rise of the moon  
save you us from this fiery well  
so much like the sights of hell  
this very place  
we care not enough  
guide us with your hands of love  
to your will  
to your way  
take no offense at what we say  
season of blood in our mood  
yes we are your final brood  
here we stand  
never to fall

let the dogs die  
over run with a million fears  
as we shed the eternal tears  
on our knees  
took you now  
take you then  
not a word will be said  
whimper as you might  
plead as you will  
no! we revolt  
now we rebel  
extinguish the taker  
that be you  
drown in our joy of killing you  
true love  
true hate  
be true to our sin  
forgive us now  
for your disgrace  
and the attempt to ruin our race  
can't take back what you've begun  
now immortal under this immortal sun  
weight on your shoulders  
pulling you down  
ah, this guilt you have found  
causes pain  
can't restrain  
the thoughts that flow  
give what you take  
take what you give  
this is the price  
we must live  
the rain falls  
the wind calls  
threatens to take your very soul  
no longer shall ye be  
clever, spinning mastery  
the sky be clear you disappear  
see our sorrow  
watch our hate  
see us demonstrate  
what we could have done  
wilt thou quiver  
woulds't thou cower  
in the never-ending shower?  
old king of fire  
old king of sea  
look upon the new king  
it is we.







## The Dragon Reigns

by Rosanne Scott

Edward held the small, round crystal warily. "And what am I to do with this?" he said.

"Hush, my child, for one who raises his voice often finds that he no longer has it." The young man spoke in quieted tones that chilled Edward to the marrow of his bones. Yet he was fascinated. The young man was most unusual looking. His voice was like the smell of cigars, rich and enticing. And his bearing was one of a king. He was slight, with the look of a newly minted coin. There was an almost sinister quality about him. He was alarmingly good looking but not in an angelic way. His hair was black and his skin was extremely pale. He did not look sickly yet his face was smooth, white like a blank canvas. His eyes were a striking green, almost jewel toned and they flashed with iridescence as he gestured and talked. Edward did not know his name yet he felt an almost familiar kinship with this young man.

"Ah yes. Many people find my appearance agreeable. Flattery will get you everywhere." This was said with no hint of arrogance, only quiet finality. Edward was nervous; his brain screamed for him to turn, to never look at this strange man in the eyes again, yet he remained. He stood as if rooted in stone.

"Listen to me, Edward!" The sky darkened ominously, the clouds roiling and layering themselves in blackish piles upon the blood red sky. The young man's features twisted for a moment into the countenance of an animal, then swiftly reverted to human as he relaxed. It was as almost as if a hand had smoothed the scowl from his face, so plastic were his movements.

Edward realized that this young man, whoever he might be, was strange indeed. There was something very ... unnatural about him. His movements were jerky--almost as if he did not belong in the body he had. He walked as if it took intense concentration just to hold himself aligned. He worked his legs and hands as if he had just gotten them, yet he was at least twenty-five years old.

Edward repeated his question. This time the eerie young man answered. "I want you to take this crystal to the Dragon Caves. In the central cavern there lives a large dragon. He has been a plague to the nearby city for months, killing wantonly when the desire strikes him. I want you to place this geode in the pouch around his neck. By returning what has been stolen, you will halt the wholesale destruction of the peasant colony.

Edward replied, "Isn't that dangerous?"

"Very. I have tried, and he gave me this. I walked away--I was lucky." With those words he pulled up his shirt to reveal a smooth, shiny white scar, paler even than his chest. Apparently the dragon had ranked him with its claws quite deeply for the scars were slightly ridged. They looked old. All traces of redness had since disappeared.

"When did this happen?" Edward was shocked; he surely could not have withstood such an attack.

"Approximately nine months ago." Edward thought that the marks were suspiciously well healed to have been inflicted less than a year ago. Their eyes met and Edward felt chills run down his arms. The young man was gazing at him as if he could read his thoughts. Edward felt as if prying hands were grasping at his most secret thoughts and hanging them out for the world to see.

The beautiful young man placed his hands on Edward's shoulders. The large green eyes looked into his own brown ones. They were almond shaped and they tilted slightly upwards, giving him a devious appearance. They were fringed with long black lashes. His lids opened wider as the pupils of the eyes dilated.

"Please, Edward. Do this and they will cheer you, they will bow down at your feet. They will make you king." Edward knew that this man, whoever he was, was using all his manipulative powers to get his way. A feeling of resentment welled up in him. He was so stubborn that when he knew he was being manipulated he would balk like a mule. 'Not this time,' thought the scarred man.

His voice changed; now it caressed Edward's ears in low, murmurous tones. "My friend, there is no one left but you."

Edward opened his mouth to protest. Surely there were others who could face the Dragon with ease. To his horror he felt his lips moving and the sound of his own voice tickled his ear. "I'll go what you want me to." For one instant his mouth had not been his to command, but the words were already said. He could not take them back.

The strange young man smiled slightly, as he saw that his victory over Edward was assured. He knew that Edward would do his bidding and that all would be made right by sundown.

Edward set out for the Dragon's lair that same hour. The journey was neither long nor difficult but all the same, the teeth of fear were steadily gnawing a hole in his courage. He knew he was drawing nearer to the mouth of

the cave when the people and animals had grown scarce. All the villagers had either fled the onslaught of the Dragon, or been devoured.

The cave itself was very ordinary looking. It was large and had many trees around it to screen the opening. Warily, Edward approached the mouth. He was quiet for he saw a long, scaly black nose just inside the entrance. It appeared that the Dragon was sleeping. He drew nearer still. Now he was about ten feet away from the large reptile.

He was beautiful; he had a long, muscular body covered with brittle, chain mail scales. His belly was a soft white. It looked very vulnerable. Almost as if it had never seen the sun. His four paws were oddly like hands, except that the fingers were crowned by sharp, heavy claws. The tail was most powerful; it coiled around his body like a well-mannered snake. The light reflected off the scales so they shone like glass. As Edward was drinking in the sight of his foe, the large black eyelids fluttered, then opened to reveal twinkling eyes. The irises were a clear pale green and the lashes were long and coal black. These eyes, as they looked at Edward, held a hint of malice at being awakened but for the most part contained only curiosity.

Edward did not know what to do so he presented the geode for the Dragon's scrutiny and approval in hopes that he could leave soon. The Dragon's eyes widened in surprise and he quickly seized the gem with one amazingly dexterous paw. He examined it carefully, rolling it between finger and thumb with human movements. He then fixed one glaring green eye upon Edward and stared fixedly at him.

Edward had the oddest sensation, as if his insides were being squeezed smaller and smaller while his material, solid self remained the same size. He panicked; the sensation was akin to being forced out the top of his head! Soon he could feel that he was rising out of his own body and hovering in the air directly above it. His mind fought wildly against this blasphemy; his body was his own and he would not vacate it without a fight. With relief he realized that he was indeed slipping back and seeing out of his own eyes. His feet were firmly on the ground an instant later. He sighed with relief and relaxed. The moment he did this, the Dragon jumped back in and wrested control of Edward's body away from him. The reptilian lips drew back in a cunning smile as the Dragon realized that he would be trapped in this cumbersome body no more. He was already anticipating how it would feel to be out of the body in which he had been trapped for almost a year. How nice it would be to walk upright, and to be able to run again. Edward, on the other hand, was shocked to discover that no matter how hard he tried he could not slip into his own self again. Even worse than that was the realization that he did not have a body of his own anymore, save the vacated body of the Dragon. He felt a tremor of real and genuine terror as he was jolted into the dragon body.

Everything felt different! All his limbs felt unbearably heavy and his neck felt disproportionately long. He opened his eyes and found that he was looking through the eyes of the Dragon. The vision was unnervingly sharp; he could see the faint beating of the pulse in his old body's neck. The enormity of the situation hit Edward like a ton of bricks. The Dragon now controlled the human body and there was no feasible way for Edward to make him relinquish that control. He was trapped!

"Oh dear God, please help me," he thought, but his lips would not form the words.

The Dragon walked away, smiling a human smile. Perhaps he did not have his old body back, but he wouldn't miss it that much. He'd never cared much for black hair anyway.

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## Men

by Chelsea Barnes

I walked into class and slammed my books down on my desk. Why do guys have to be such jerks? I can't believe he actually thought I would believe that crap. Lies, lies. Everything he said was lies! I've done everything I can, but he still lies.

Maybe it's that he just doesn't care about me. I don't think he cares about anyone but himself. There are times when he can say things so sweet but then **SNAP!** He's a totally different person.

He never wanted to spend time with me. Isn't that what have a relationship is all about? I realize that guys don't really like to be committed or anything, but you'd think he would have realized this was going to happen sooner or later. He thinks he can just do whatever he wants with no regard to anyone else's feelings. We'll, I'm not going to take it anymore.



Maybe we should take a break from each other for a while. Yeah, maybe that would be the best thing to do. I really would rather just work things out, but I don't see how anything can ever be worked out if he keeps on lying to me. What we need in this relationship is honesty. What we need is to talk, but all we seem to do is fight. I just don't know what to do.

Oh, there's the bell. It's lunchtime, so I guess this is it. I feel so nervous, but I've got to do what I've got to do.

Wait! I don't want to break up with him. I really care about him a lot. I don't know what I would do without him. I know we can work things out if we just talk about it.

Maybe he'll do it, the breaking up I mean. Maybe that's what he wants. Maybe he'd be more happy without me around. He probably gets sick and tired of me always asking where he's going and when he's going to call me. I think that lots of girls ask their boyfriends these questions so why can't he just deal with it. I don't ask that much from him. I just want him to give me the same respect I give him.

There he is. He's standing next to my locker. Well, this is it. I guess if anything is going to happen it's going to happen now.

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## **Women**

by Brian Barton

She passed me by and didn't say anything, not even a HELLO! That really got me mad and on top of that, I just heard she started to see another guy. She's so heartless! Two days after we broke up she is seeing someone else. What a bitch! "You are the one and only," she said. I wonder if she's going to tell him the same thing. I can't believe I called her a bitch. I still care about her, but right now it doesn't matter. Or does it? What should I say to her?

Should I tell her how much she hurt me or say I still love her? What if she still loves me, but then why did she break up? I'm so confused. She said she didn't know why, but that she just has to. Oh, the bell just rang and I'm late to class. What a day this is, and it's just begun. I now have to deal with her in this class, what fun. During the class period, she keeps looking at me and then looking away. What does she want from me? All of a sudden a note is thrown on my desk, what's this? It's a note from her, asking if I'm mad and if we can be friends.

She wants me to write back. I can't believe she has the nerve to ask to be friends! I suppose I should write back, but what should I say? Should I tell her how I feel or should I tell her I still love her and want to talk about what happened? The day passed on and my friend and I ditched school to talk about this whole ordeal. He kept telling me that she's not worth it and you'll find some other girl.

There she is. She's walking towards my locker. I wonder what she is going to say. Well, what ever happens, happens.

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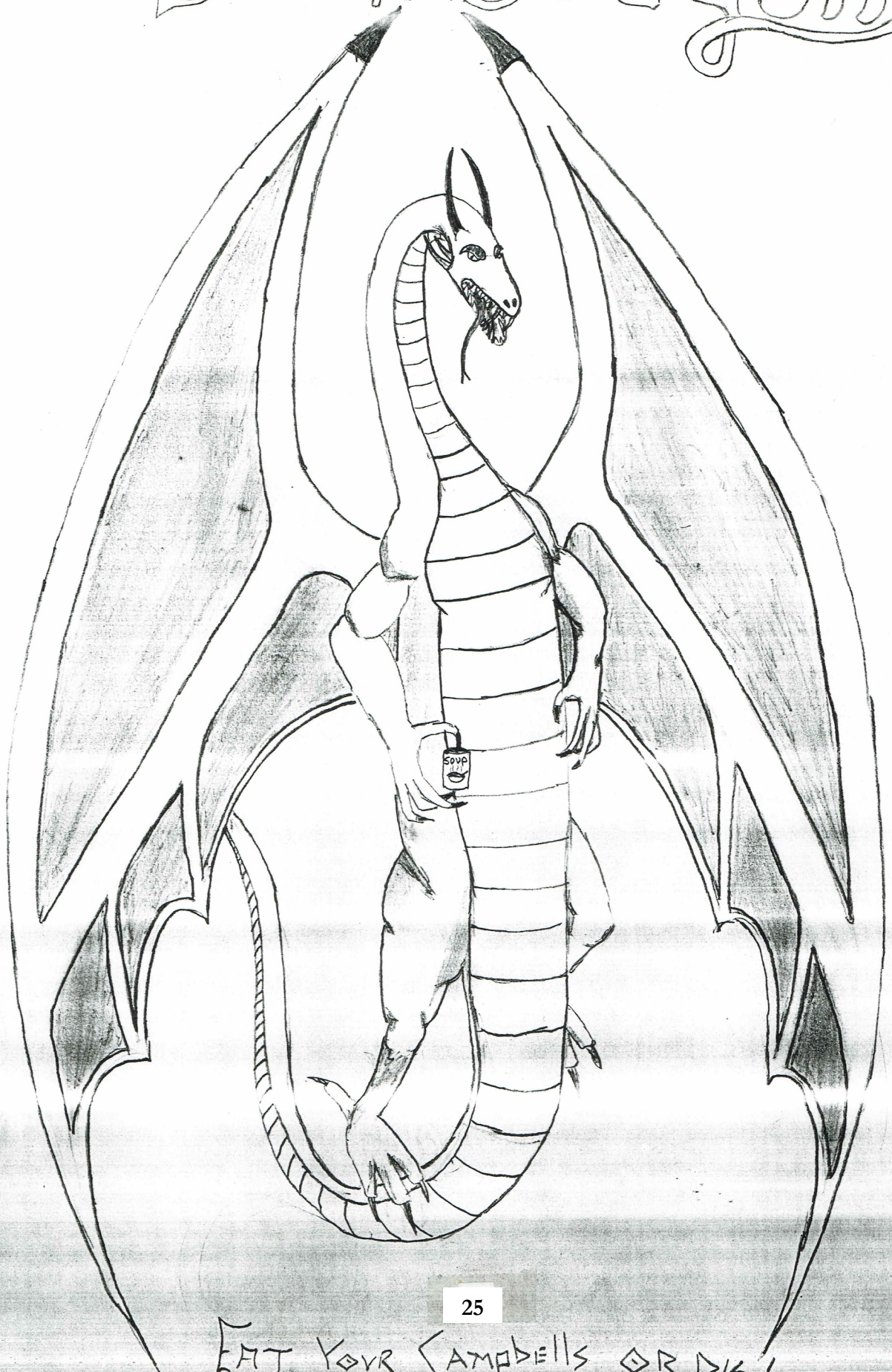
## **My Home On A Cloud, Book Two**

by Robert Clark

Years in the future, I started to work on a new experiment. That experiment was a way to capture the famed Space Cat. The Space Cat was known throughout the galaxy. It was wanted for it's fur, but nobody could catch it. So they sent for me, the world's greatest scientist. Yes! I'm the world's greatest scientist because of a discovery I made years ago. That discovery made me world famous. It was how to make clouds hard, so people could live in the sky. That experiment was a success. This experiment I don't know about. It sounded easy at first, but I don't know that it is now. You see, I started this experiment a month ago. So now all I've got to show for it is this funny looking contraption that just sits in my lab. The contraption has four legs, something that looks like a head, and something that looks like a body with a door on it. So, now I'm getting tired of looking at it. Tomorrow I'll go to town to see if I can get a space car.

I love to go to town because of all the neat things I see. I think I forgot to tell you the name of the town, it's called Cottage Grove. There's the little bakery that I visit every time I come to town. I like the smell of freshly fried donuts. I came to town to get the new 5000, it's a new kind of space car. The car shop is located two blocks from

# Soup Dragon



25

EAT YOUR CAMPBELLS OR DIE!

M

the bakery. The reason I'm going to get the 5000 is so I can go the space station fast and set my trap. Although I don't think it will work. The 5000 is supposed to be able to go .9 past light speed. That means that I'll be to the station in no time at all.

The car was easy to find. It has a sleek, red exterior, plush, cushioned seats, and a beautiful control console. The company always makes its items easy to find. Just like everything else in town, but the price was a little high.

Well, it's off to the space station to set up my trap. I plan to put it in one of the least used areas on the station, known as the cage. It's a small area on the space station said to eat people up. It's because of the scientist who used to work, or live there. He's said to have created the space eat, but there's no evidence of that. I think it would be neat to meet this scientist, but he is said to have died three years ago and left the cage smelling like rotten fish. To the watch dog they put in front of the door to the cage, it smelled like heaven.

The way to the station is to go past Jupiter and take a hard right, then you're there.

The station is a big place, but I still found a way to the cage, now I can hide my trap. You should have seen the faces of the people I asked as I tried to find the cage. They turned white when I mentioned the cage. I found what the people were afraid of. It's just a little monkey. Plus there were other animals. Like a panther, it's in a cage, so I'm not worried about it. Then there's the hamsters in a glass case. Everything here is so cute I want to take it all home with me. There's only one problem. How am I going to get them all in my space car?

The people here are kind, but if you ask me, I'd say that they're suspicious of everything you do. I plan to stay the night. I got good accommodations. They're on the sixth floor, fifth room on the right. The restaurant here has delicious food, too. The dessert was wonderful. I'm going to check the trap tomorrow.

You'll never guess what I found in the trap. It was amazing. The fur was the softest, fluffiest, silkiest. There aren't enough words to describe the feeling. It was like touching a kitten that is only two days old. I liked the feel of it. I've never touched anything so sweet, lovely, kind, or sensitive as the space cat. It's no wonder everybody wants it's fur. Just touching it could make you fall in love with the cat. Also, the color of the cat is always changing. They hunted for the cat for five months. Then never found it because it didn't want to be found. Anyway I still have to figure out a way to get all of the animals off the space station.

It was easy to get them all off the station. I made them think they were playing a game. Hide and seek to be precise. They love to play hide and seek, which made it that much easier. Now that I'm home, I can keep them all a secret. That is until I think it's time the world knew about them. Then they would probably take them away from me for scientific research.

My house is a big place, but I know every square inch of it, so I have to limit the space they can play in. Now I have to think of a name for all of my new friends. I named them Marve, Spark, Sneeky, Helpful, Pain, and What. I did a little work with names last year. So that helped a little. I hope they like their names. I don't name anything without its opinion. The panther chose Sneeky for his name. The cat chose Spark for himself. The monkey chose Marve. That leaves the hamsters with Helpful, Pain, and What. The brown hamster chose Helpful. The cream colored hamster chose Pain. The last hamster still liked the name What.

Sneeky likes to take my shoes. Helpful helps me find them. Spark likes to help Sneeky take my shoes. What likes to get Spark in trouble. Pain likes to bite What in the rear. Marve likes to put Pain in the plastic hamster ball to keep him away from What. I have to make sure they don't break anything.

I don't know why I brought them home with me. I think it was because I fell in love with them the first time I saw them.

Now I have to find a job at a school to support us. I hate having to teach people who think themselves better than me.

I found a job at a college in town. There are three colleges in town. The Slim College is where I teach. The Town College is the biggest college in town. The last college I always forget. The Slim College hired me in a second. I don't think I'm as good as they think I am. I'd be happy to disappoint them. They need someone better than me, as my dad would always say, "a job is a job."

My class is a good group of young men and women. They look forward to seeing me each day. I try to teach them, but something keeps me from teaching them everything I know. It's as if something were blocking my mind. I don't know what it is, but it disturbs me more each day. I like my class, but something tells me someone in my class isn't telling me something.

Today I found something in one of the desks after school. It was one of those new stun guns. When I looked at the seating chart I found it belonged to my best student. I didn't know what to think. So I hid the gun in

the secret cubbyhole in my classroom. I thought that if he wanted it, he could come ask me for it. He didn't ask, then he didn't show up for class. I called his apartment; no answer.

After school that day I went to his apartment. After knocking three or four times, I banged on the door. There was no answer. Now I'm really worried. Something might have happened to him.

I called the police when I got home that night. They said that I shouldn't be worried about some kid. Then they said that he was probably taken by the F.B.I. When I asked why, they said I should go home and forget any of this ever happened.

Now that I'm home the animals decide to tell me that I'm a MUTANT! That's something I've always wanted to be. Mutants are supposed to be the guards of Earth. Mutants are also thought as a myth. To be a mutant is to be a guard of Earth. Now I've got to figure out what my powers are. The animals won't tell me so I'm on my own. This is going to be a problem that only I can solve. How, though, am I going to explain this to my class? I just don't know how. My class would probably laugh at me if I told them. It's probably best to keep this to myself. That's all I can do right now.

Now I've got to learn how to use my mutant powers. It's not safe for people to be around an untrained mutant. Some say the more trained the better.

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## CINDERELLA'S SILENCE

by an anonymous author

A full yet thin white glove caressed the locked front door. The occupants of the house were unaware of the blackness slowly capturing the previously illuminous day. He had had a long standing curiosity about the house. Quietly the silhouette crept around the sharp edges of the house. Noticing how the house was configured on the outside, he peered through the cloudy window. He noticed that the whole house was decorated with varnished oak and cedar, including the floor. He then thought of ways to decrease the shrieking of the old rostrum styled flooring. He deduced by taking off his shoes he could lessen the pressure on the floor.

Although the door was locked, it was not a problem in the completion of his task. Looking around the porch area for something to snap the lock with, he noticed several shoe laces unsuspiciously spread about the area. Shrugging an incriminating thought away he removed an old crowbar inconspicuously placed beneath some underbrush. With a large blow, the revised yet unsturdy dead bolt, simply snapped off, oddly not making a sound. He quickly slipped off his footwear, putting them on to one of the shaky steps leading to the back entrance of the house. The old decrepit door slid uninhibitingly open. The house remained quiet.

Across the oaken floor, the intruder slid. Observing the building, he noticed there was something missing. He wasn't sure what it was, though. Remembering the weather outside was frigid and cold, he took note that there was no contraction of the house. As he began ascending upon the unpadded staircase, not a sound came from the old rundown steps. Upon placing his weight on the seventh step, it gave way, plunging him, unaware of what had happened, into a blanket of darkness. The breaking of the step made a thunder that would have spread around the small house, if it had made any audible intonation.

He soon awoke; a small bump was placed next to his left temple awkwardly shaped like a heel of a shoe. Painfully, he let out a chilling scream that would have woken the dead if it had made a sound. He couldn't even hear himself think or the blood rushing through the capillaries of his ears. As he felt around to get a sense of where he was, he discovered piles upon piles of shoes.

Picking up a pair of shoes, he noticed a small bright glimmer of light that shone through a minute crack in the paneling. Deducing that the movement of the shoe may have caused the light, he jumbled the shoes in a frantic rage, waiting to see what would happen.

Soon the whole wall became a beacon of raging, brilliant hues and auras, filling the private chamber. The scintillation became blinding but he entered, in a desperate attempt to remove himself from the small closet of a room, unaware of what lay beyond it. The illumination quickly faded away as he came upon hundreds of fluorescent outlines. At that moment a cacophony of sounds echoed through the large and full chamber, deafening him. Seeing his reflection in the crystalline walls of this structure frightened him. He was going mad because of the raging sound. It appeared to him that the outlines may have been just like him and perhaps had gone through the same ordeal as he did. He soon became just another outline painted across an ice-like wall.





¡Enrique!

Enrique

©1993

A full yet thin glove caressed the locked door. The silence of the house was unaware of the light of the illuminous day slowly capturing the previously black dismal night. He decided to remove his shoes.

*To Be Continued...*

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## **Out At Night**

by T.J. Belknap

**MAGGY** I remember it well. Up and about forty-five years ago, it was. I was just a child only ten. I didn't understand. I didn't understand why I'd never known my pa. I didn't understand why my mother forbade me to leave our yard after sundown. I didn't understand what my brother did. I only understood that every night he left, I wanted to go too.

**MAGGY (WHINES)** Riley, I wanna go, too.

**RILEY** Hush, Maggy. Ma'll hear ya and get after ya.

**MAGGY** I'll scream. She's just down the lane. Ma'll stop ya from going.

**RILEY** Iffin you scream, I'll take all your underthings ta school and hang 'em on the flag pole.

**MAGGY** Ulp! But I've never been outside in the dark. Is it any different?

**RILEY** Oh, Maggy, it's truly wonderful. I gotta go. Good night.

**(RILEY MOVES FORWARD ON THE STAGE AND SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE)**

**RILEY** I didn't wanna leave her there, all alone. I could hear her crying as I walked out the door. I hated ta see girls cry, especially Maggy Lee. Ma never cried. Ma never showed no emotion. She was in town that night. Outta dinner with the smithy. He was gonna propose ta her. Before she left us she tole us she'd say yes. Not 'cause she loved him, but 'cause she wanted a stable man. I wish the smithy coulda proposed some other time. Then Ma woulda been home ta keep Maggy Lee where she belonged.

But as it was, me, a man of all my sixteen years, went off 'n left my baby sista crying at the front window. I went off to fight in the war bein' fought over my people.

**(RILEY FADES BACK ON THE STAGE AS MAGGY STEPS FORWARD ON STAGE AND SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE)**

**MAGGY** I should'na followed him. But I did. As soon as he was out the front gate I wiped my tears and headed out the door.

Oh, the night. I'd never been outside after sundown before. It was all new and exhilarating. I could taste the sweetness of the evening air. I could hear the crickets chirp. Even the salty sea smelled different in the darkness. I wanted to reach out and touch the full moon hanging overhead.

But, I had to concentrate. Riley was almost outa sight. I quickly followed him through the tall oceanside grass.

**(MAGGY FADES BACK ON THE STAGE AS RILEY STEPS FORWARD)**

**RILEY**

Standing on that cliff seemed so right, yet it didn't. I loved those high cliffs overlooking the sea. I spent a lot of time there during the day. But night was a different story. Strange things went on up there at night. Things I really didn't wanta be a part of. I didn't hate the Negras or the Catholics or nobody. Hatin' just wasn't a parta me. But the fellows at school didn't understand that. They was always askin', "Why ain't cha one of us? How come? Ya'll a nigger-lover?" Then Mr. Pricher at the General Store said, "It t'aint right for the man in ya family not ta be in the Klan." So there I was. Waitin' ta be initiated into the Klu Klux Klan.

**(RILEY FREEZES IN PLACE AS MAGGY STEPS FORWARD)**

**MAGGY**

I hid in the tall grass and watched Riley build a fire. I couldn't figure out why he was up on the cliffs. Then I went an' stepped on a stick.

**RILEY**

Who's there? C'mon now I heard ya.

(Pause)

**MAGGY**

It's just me.

**RILEY**

Maggy Lee, go home! It ain't right that you're here.

**MAGGY**

I can go anywhere you can.

**RILEY**

Honey, you might git hurt.

**MAGGY**

Why? Who'd hurt me?

**RILEY**

They just would.

**MAGGY**

Who?

**RILEY**

Maggy, go back ta the house. I don't want ya here. (Sigh)

**MAGGY**

What's wrong, Riley?

**RILEY**

Go home, Ma...Shh!...Hide!

**(RILEY TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE)**

**RILEY**

They were coming! Dear God I was scared!

**MAGGY (ASIDE)**

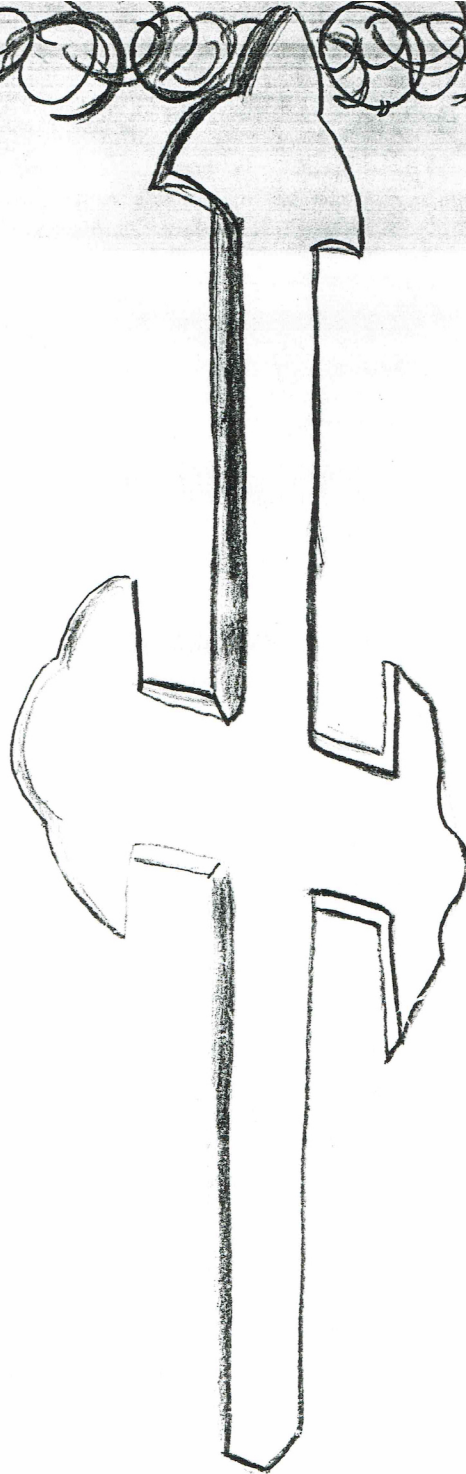
I shrunk back to hide in the tall grass as Riley told me to do. He always knew what was right. I had already disobeyed him once that night. Trusting him seemed easy to do again.

They came outa the trees. All dressed in white robes with funny hoods. The place I loved to picnic at in the summer was suddenly foreboding. The night I had loved a few minutes before suddenly became dark, close, and unfriendly.

Riley stood up quick-like. The moon shone around him like a ray of sun. He stammered a greeting, but was told to be quiet. "Boy," one of the faceless men said, "Why din yo pa initiate you sooner?"

"I don't know my pa, sir," Riley explained meek-like.





**Adventure**



“Ain’t no men with kids dead ‘round here in a while,” another rode said.

No, I wanted to scream. He ain’t dead, he’s just on a long trip. But Riley just smiled sadly and said, “I don’t know my pa, sir. I got a pa an’ his name is on the records, but we goes by my mama’s name.”

All of a sudden one voice shouted, “He’s that nigger’s son. Y’all know him. Davey Lee from the next county. Records say he had two brats but they ain’t in his wife’s brood. They’s just disappeared, and here’s his boy.”

What? I was so confused. Riley’s middle name was David, but we weren’t black. We was Irish. Riley, I wanted to cry out, tell ‘em they’re wrong! But I stayed quiet ‘cause Riley just sat there with a little smile. I wanted to go running out there and tell those nasty men myself, but it was no use. Riley woulda just got mad at me. So I just held my breath.

All the men grumbled and turned to leave. Slowly I let my breath out. Then one turned and yelled, “We don’t want no niggers ‘round here messin’ up our children.” Riley just turned and looked out over the sea.

Dear God, the man had a gun. Riley didn’t see it! Oh God, he was going ta shoot, give me strength.

“Riley!” I screamed.

Riley started and twirled around. But he lost his footing. Little bits of cliff rolled down and splashed in the sea. Riley grabbed out for something but started to fall. All the noises and sights swirled in my head and he fell. The man ran off in the trees as I ran out in the opening. I peered over the cliff. But, it was too far down. Riley was gone.

## **MAGGY BEGINS TO CRY SOFTLY**

## **RILEY TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE**

**RILEY** But, I wan’t gone. I was standing there just off the cliff, watching. I ran to her to comfort her. I put my arms around her, but she took no notice.

Oh, Maggy Lee, don’t cry. I’m OK. See.

## **MAGGY STILL CRIES**

**RILEY** Maggy, it’s OK.

**MAGGY** I made him fall. He said ta stay put, but I didn’t.

**RILEY** But look! I wouldna fell, ‘xceptin’ that he shot me. Look, Maggy, look.

But she wouldn’t look, she just sat an’ cried. I went off ta go get Ma. She’s help, maybe.

**MAGGY** I did, ya know. I made him fall. The cruel words surprised me so much. But not Riley, it was almost like he knew.

The night was no longer beautiful. Now it was sad and scary. Beams of angelic moon light, sounds of the ocean, evening air. They no longer fascinated me. Now they were all filled with white robes, guns, and screaming boys.

I don't go out at night any more. Riley told me to stay at home.

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## **The Dilemma**

by D. O'Dorant

He was airsick, that was the problem. How he hated to fly. He couldn't whistle, or even hum, he was so ill. The young man was on the red-eye flight to Detroit. His mission: kill those at GM. He had given up on destroying his "friends" at Psychopathic Murderers Unanimous. He had been handed a better mission.

He scratched his face and realized he needed to shave. Luckily, he had brought a disposable razor with him. He went to the bathroom and began shaving, using lathered soap as shaving cream.

Suddenly, the entire plane shook and he sliced his cheek. The captain's voice came over the loud speaker apologizing for the air turbulence.

The youth stared at his face, watching blood well from his wound. Sick, sick, sick.

He stumbled out of the restroom queasily, the combined effects of the airsickness and the sight of blood making him decidedly ill.

The maladjusted man grabbed the nearest flight attendant by the throat and began to squeeze. She screamed, but he put a stop to that by snapping her neck. He flung her aside and snatched the next one that came running.

"Take me to the captain," he told her, his only thought was to get off this damnable machine. He wanted to land, now! She obliged and seconds later he was in the cockpit staring into the sky.

"Land," he told the captain throatily. He showed him his knife he had snuck aboard (it was made of industrial hardened plastic, he had picked it up in Sumatra during a tour of duty through the Peace Corpse).

"Now?"

"Well..." the youth thought for a moment. He had always wanted to go to England and visit Jack the Ripper's homeland.

What to do? What to do? He might never get another chance to go to Britain again...

"Okay, I want you to do two things," the airsick youth said. "First, I want you to fly to Britain. Second I want some Lomine pills.

A half hour later they were forced to land and refuel, then they were off. The man placed the pills in his mouth and swallowed. He felt better nearly instantly.

Only one decision was left. Where should he visit first in the UK. He sat back, whistling Yankee Doodle and thought about it.

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## **Guns, Bullets & Targets**

by Meredith Carlson

The dry heat of the New Mexico Territory air drew beads of sweat on the red-haired boy's face.

The boy, who called himself Joseph Gawith, crouched behind the battered fence waiting to be discovered by the fat store keeper and his son, from whom he had stolen bread.

"I recon he's in the crapper," the son said, referring to a nearby outhouse.

The store keeper strode toward the outhouse, rifle in hand.

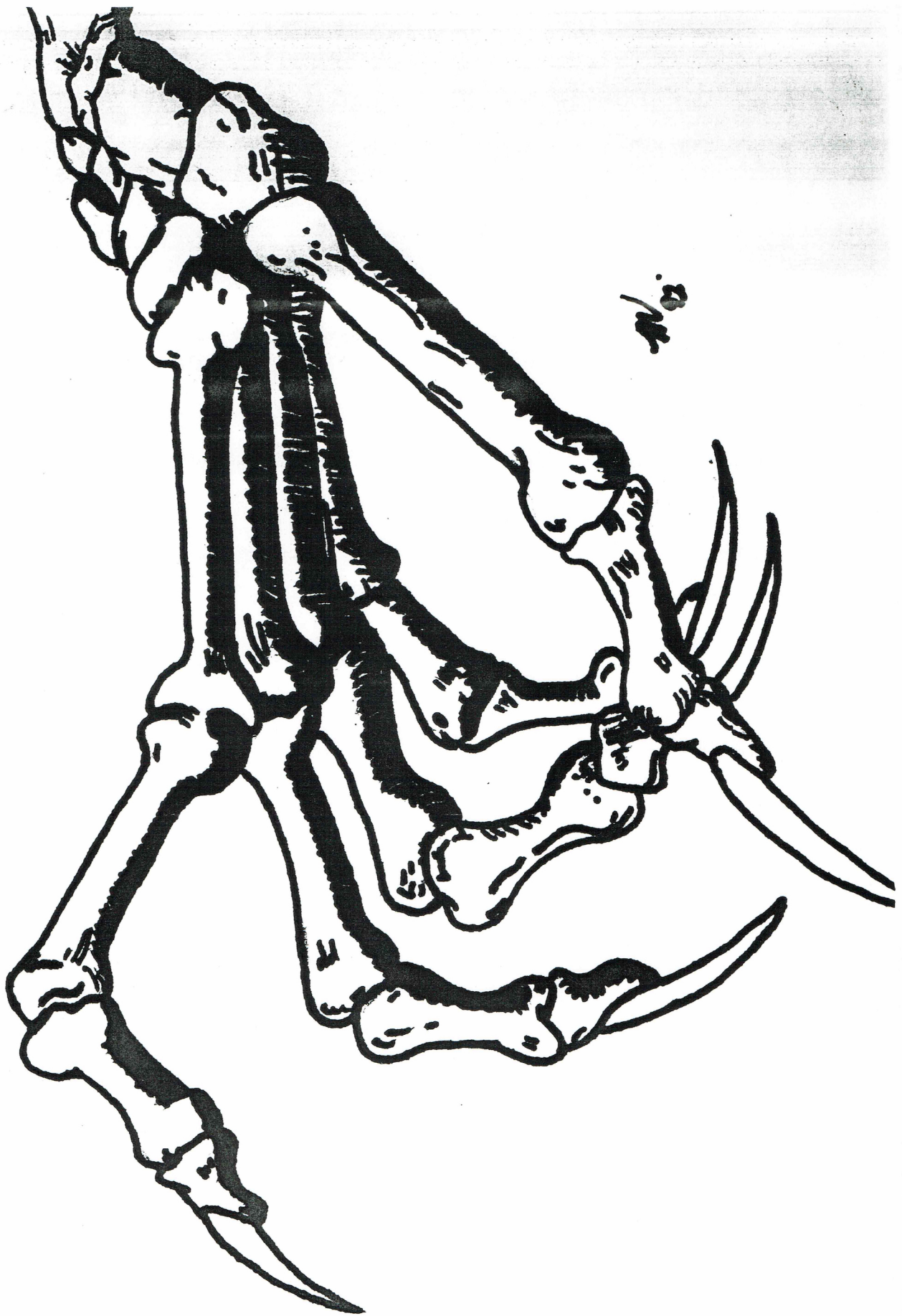
Joseph had the almost uncontrollable desire to crack the obese man's skull with the butt of his revolver.

He held his breath as the ignorant, alcoholic store keeper opened the door to the outhouse.

Suddenly, gun fire sounded and the store keeper was on the ground, a bloody hole blown in his chest.

Out of the outhouse jumped Davey Ray, Joseph's brother and companion.

"What the hell are you doin'?" Joseph stood and shouted.





The son of the laid out store keeper screamed and ran to get his father's rifle.  
 "Joseph," Dave yeller, pointing to the son, "Shoot!"  
 Joseph began to panic. *This wasn't part of the plan*, he thought. *He shot him!*  
 "Shoot him, Joseph! He's got a gun," he heard Dave's voice tugging at his mind.  
 Joseph pointed his revolver at the storekeeper's son and pulled the trigger.  
 When he missed, Dave yelled, "God damn it, Joseph!" and shot the son of the store keeper himself.  
 Down the street, a woman screamed. When Joseph looked, he saw two children being pulled away by the owner of the voice.  
 "Joseph," Dave was already on his horse, "Wake up!"  
 Joseph ran toward a nearby stable. His eyes were glazed over with terror and regret, blinded to a blur.  
 Trembling, he unhitched his mare and led it out of the stable.  
 When Dave saw that he had his horse, he yelled, spurring his horse into a gallop.  
 Startled at the other horse's action, Joseph's mare took off before Joseph could get on. Joseph gave a strangled yelp of surprise as he struggled not to fall off the frightened horse.  
 Relief overwhelmed him when he finally positioned himself in the saddle evenly.  
 The two brothers trekked across the prairie for hours until the horses were exhausted. Gradually their pace slowed to a trot, then to a walk.  
 The two young men had not spoken since the shooting. Joseph tried hard to listen to the wind and forget his hunger, but the nightmare of seeing the storekeeper's intestine, mutilated and spilling out of his stomach wouldn't leave him. Remembering the terrorized son of the storekeeper; the look of horror that made it's way across the boy's features as he witnessed his father's death continued to plague him.  
 Finally, the combination of his stomach's demand for food and the graphic murders struck him sick. He leaned over in his saddle and heaved.  
 "You alright?" Dave asked, watching his brother extrude what was left of his breakfast.  
 Joseph didn't say anything. His stomach was still protesting to relax.  
 "I had to shoot him, Joseph," Dave explained.  
 "The plan was if he found you in the outhouse, you were gonna kick him out of you way," Joseph said, halfway to himself. "You didn't have to shoot him!"  
 "He was gonna see my face! We woulda been reported to the sheriff!" He shouted back. Dave took a moment to calm down. "It was the only way."  
 There was silence then. Joseph got off his horse and reached into his saddle bag for something to eat, but then rechecked himself and decided to wait until he could swallow without gagging.  
 He thought about what his brother said. "We ain't never killed no on before, Dave."  
 "I know," he responded grimly, "It was the only way."

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## Death

by Tim Hadley

I parried with my broadsword, and with all my barbarian's strength behind it, swung my iron shield at my opposer. It connected with the left section of his skull, and I could feel the satisfying crack of bones being crushed. He flew to the ground, dead, as I turned to meet the next guard. He was a man tall in height, muscular, and looked capable of handling his mace.  
 I swung my sword down to test his abilities. As we connected, the force of his blow sent me reeling backwards. The madness had overcome him, and I knew that I couldn't conquer him without all my skill and luck. It was a battle between my skill and his ferocity. Finally I saw my chance. The warrior- swung mace, and Z Gadget- 3d the spiked club. He was expecting a blow, and so a miss made him lose his balance. While he was trying to regain it, I swung my broadsword. He put up his mace desperately, but he didn't have time to put his strength behind it. My sword knocked it away, slashing him across the chest, leaving a great gash. With a cry he fell to the ground, mortally wounded.

He lay there looking at me for a moment, with all the hatred of a dying dragon. As I watched with surprise, a hazy red mist lifted from him I could feel less hatred now, and when I looked into his face again, his eyes were somehow different, now with a seemingly hint of relief in them.

As I stood there, he beckoned to me to lean forward, as if wanting to tell me something. In an anguished, forced voice that came from having his injury, he said, "I thank you for the service you have done for me, for I will no longer be a slave of the Raging Madness."

"But what have I done," I asked him, "short of giving you a wound that will soon bring death?"

"You have freed me from the evil spell that controlled my actions, my thoughts, everything."

"I don't understand."

"I shall explain to you, for you may be able to stop this terrible thing that is plaguing the land."

Many months ago, a man entered our village Nanderain, seeking shelter from the night. In return, he promised the townfolk a statue of our lord, Selreoh Arsein if we would put him up until it was done. Naturally this was granted, for we wished to please our master. We didn't expect anything from this man, he looked like a traveling stonecutter, a man we probably would never hear from again after the statue was done. This is the way of many tradesmen, you see, who travel across the country, trading their skills for food and lodging.

As time went by, he began to ask strange requests from us, such as paintings of the kind, herbs from far-off places, maps of the town, and others. If we had known what he was planning, we would have burned him alive at the stake as an evil sorcerer. We were an innocent folk then, and so foolishly we granted his requests, however odd they appeared to us.

The day of the unveiling of the statue came, and even our lord had come to watch. The stranger was standing there, with a huge cloth wrapped around something large. When he pulled the cloth away, the audience gasped in horror. There, inside a stone ring, lay a sleeping demon. The stranger removed his tattered cloak to reveal magician's garb. With his arms weaving a hideous spell, he made the stone ring disappear, to free the dragon.

The demon awoke, snarled hideously, and vanished, leaving a red smoke. The smoke began to move and enveloped us all. We began to fight with each other, until the magician spoke.

"Do not be foolish," he said, "Why fight amongst yourselves when there is an entire world to conquer?"

We have been raiding small towns, villages, and cities ever since, just to try to satisfy our lust for bloodshed and our need to dominate. Now that I look back, I realize what a monster we have become. Please, I beg of you, help free our country, that my soul may rest in peace. If the magician stays in control and the madness is not stopped, we may soon be unconquerable."

"Tell me the name of the magician," I asked the dying man, "so I may seek him out and destroy him."

"His name," his breath was rasping now, "is-----"

An arrow came whizzing through the air. My instincts made me jump out of the way. The arrow, intended for me, struck the wounded soldier through the heart. He made one more effort to say the name, and died.

Infuriated, I turned to see who had shot the arrow. Facing me were seven bowmen, six guards, and an ogre. At the captain's command, the bowmen raised their bows, aimed...

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## **Job Opportunity**

by Devin Miller

### Chapter One

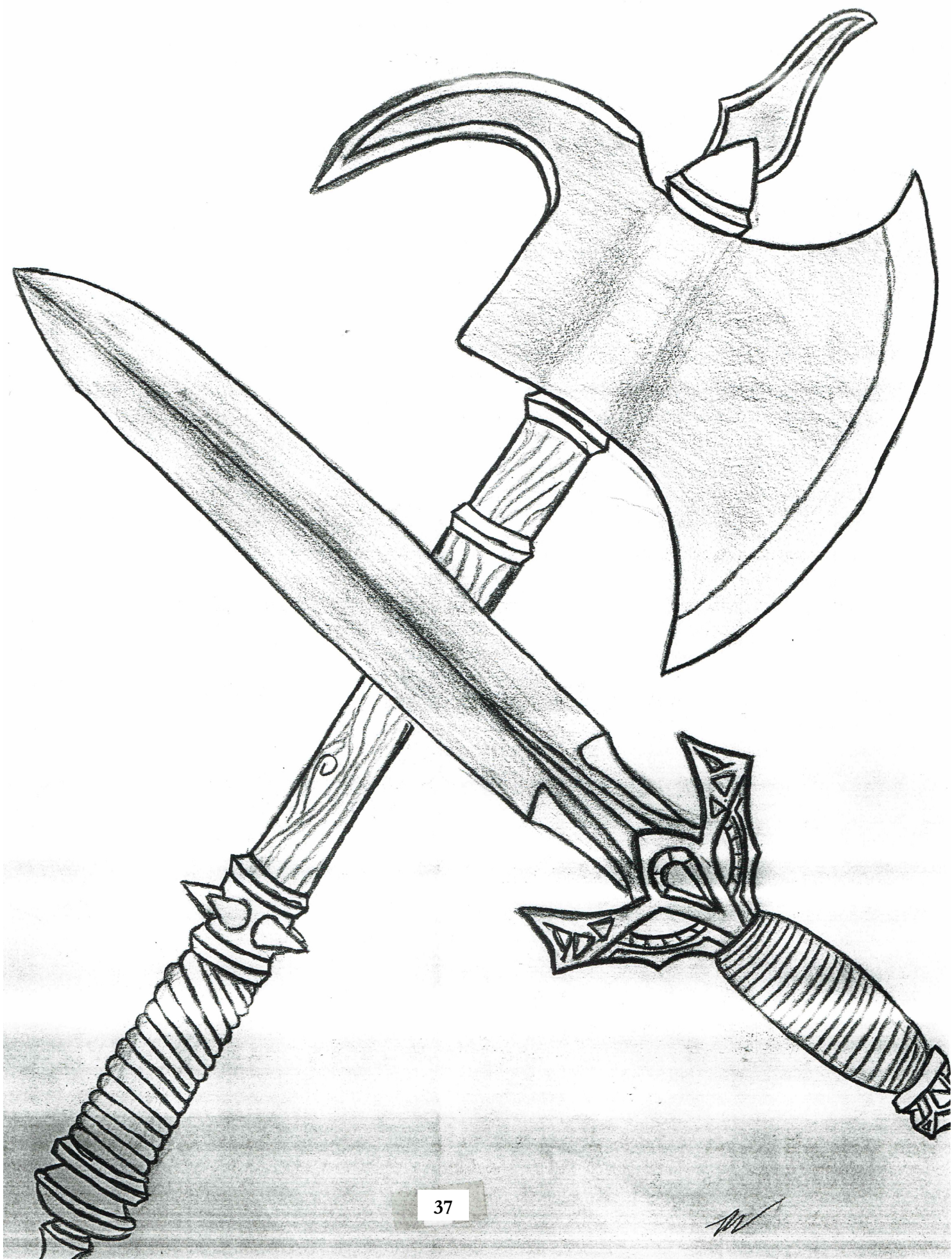
The light from the sign shone dimly in the alley, faintly illuminating Cedric Moore as he cautiously made his way through it.

A sudden noise at his right caught his attention and in a movement almost too quick to see with the human eye, Cedric withdrew a pistol from within his jacket and had it aimed at the noise. Further investigation revealed it to be only a mother cat and her kittens.

Moments later, Cedric had reached his objective: a door within a recessed doorway. Nearly effortlessly he disabled the alarm system and picked the lock.

Inside was a stairwell leading up. Hardly pausing, Cedric ran up them until he reached the fifth floor.

Silent as a cat, he stole inside and approached the third door.





He opened the door, gun again in hand. The room was lavishly decorated with rare paintings and sculptures. At the far end was a desk, and behind that desk sat a man, slumped forward with his head in his hands.

Cedric had nearly reached him before the man noticed him.

He raised his head and stared dully at Cedric. "I guess I really screwed up, didn't I?" he remarked. "What's the gun for? You gonna shoot me or something?"

"No. Reg, I'm not a member of the Board of Business, I am an agent of PoliSec. I've been investigating you for the last month."

"Shit. I shouldn't be surprised. How long has PoliSec suspected me?" he asked.

"Only three months, since Vice Governor Williamson shot himself. We didn't believe it was just suicide, so we investigated, and came up with your name. I was sent to find out exactly what happened. What I discovered was a mass blackmail system, headed by you. You are to accompany me to my car, where I will take you to the PoliSec HQ of this planet."

"Don't Bother. Like I said, I really screwed up. I tried to blackmail Senator Weathers with some pictures of him committing adultery, only to find out he is a subcapo in this planet's mafia. He dispatched assassins twenty minutes ago. I am already dead," Reg said.

"Get under the desk. Don't say a word. Don't make any sound at all. And don't move, no matter what! I'll go check out the building. When I come back, I expect you to still be crouched under that desk, silent as death, if you'll forgive the expression," Cedric told him.

Spinning around, Cedric left the office. He encountered the first assassin around the first corner from the office. Surprise registered in the assassin's eyes at seeing an armed man suddenly in his path.

Cedric quickly stepped inside the assassin's reach and chopped at his gun hand, divulging him of his gun. But this time, the assassin had recovered from his surprise, he was in a stance that suggested he knew a form of martial arts.

Cedric knew he had to take this man silently lest he alert the other assassins that he knew were in the building. He cursed himself for not bringing his silencer with him as he bolstered his pistol. This was going to be difficult.

The assassin chose this moment to attack. He leaped at Cedric in a furious whirlwind of hands. Cedric blocked the first blow with his forearm, but caught the second in the jaw.

Slightly stunned, Cedric returned the attack, aiming a blow at the assassin's nose as he brought his knee towards the assassin's groin.

As he had expected, the assassin blocked Cedric's punch, but didn't even see his knee. The pain brought the assassin to his knees. Before the assassin could react, Cedric kicked him in the face, propelling him onto his back. Cedric followed this up with a stomp on the assassin's throat, crushing him windpipe, insuring death.

He threw the body in a nearby office and went back to examine the assassin's gun. It was a silenced .75 caliber Colt recoil-less pistol, very useful for silent executions.

Keeping the assassin's gun, Cedric moved along the hall. He guessed the next assassin would be waiting on the first floor near where the elevator and stairs were, should Reg have escaped the first assassin. He debated momentarily the best course of action and decided to send an elevator down, having it stop on all floors between while he ran down the stairs.

Reaching the stairs, Cedric didn't actually run down them, but slid down the banisters.

He exploded out the door on the first floor, diving to the right, hoping to catch the assassin watching the elevators. Unfortunately, the assassin was far too a pro to do this. As Cedric dove out the door, the assassin reacted by firing several shots in his direction, one close enough to literally part his hair.

Cedric rolled to the left, firing. The assassin may have been quicker, but Cedric was better. Five shots later, the assassin lay dead, with a bullet wound in the neck, a gaping hole in his head caused by another bullet, and two bullets absorbed by the assassin's body armor. The final bullet had missed completely and had taken out a clock in the wall across the lobby.

Cedric debated whether or not to hide the body and decided not to bother, considering three-quarters of his head lay scattered across the area in front of the elevator.

Feeling suddenly weak, Cedric sank into a nearby chair and examined his head. The bullet had cut a groove across his scalp at least a third of a centimeter deep and it was starting to bleed profusely. Cedric tore a piece of cloth off the dead assassin's clothes and used it as a headband to prevent blood from streaming into his eyes.

He now considered where the third, and probably final assassin would be. The mafia rarely sent any more or less than three hitmen to a single target.

The assassins had probably landed their skycar on the roof and dropped the third assassin off, which was illegal, but that probably hadn't deterred them much, as murder was illegal also.

Cedric hadn't a moment to lose. He rode the elevator to the fifth floor and ran to the room in which Reg was. Quietly he entered the office. Inside was the third assassin, dressed completely in black. Not hesitating, both his and Reg's lives were at stake, he raised the pistol and fired, point-blank, into the assassin's head.

The force from the shot propelled the assassin forward onto the desk, his head hanging limply over the edge. Reg chose this moment to start screaming. He scrambled out from under the desk and ran towards Cedric.

"It's all right. He's dead. They're all dead. Calm down. You can go to a nice safe rehab hospital," Cedric told him soothingly. "Come on. Let's go before the police arrive."

Reg's shoulders were shaking as Cedric led him towards the door. He glanced back at the assassin Cedric had killed, as if to make sure he was really dead. A strangled moan escaped Reg's lips as some force impacted into Cedric's back.

Cedric dropped to his knees as pain flooded his system. He gritted his teeth as he reached back to discover a knife there. Quickly, violently, he jerked the knife out. He glance up in time to hear the phutt of a silencer and see Reg's head explode in a mass of brain tissue and blood. The assassin he had shot was obviously alive somehow, despite the bloody hole in the back of his head.

The assassin gazed at Cedric and grinned. He dropped his gun and withdrew another knife as he approached Cedric.

Somehow Cedric reached his feet. The assassin drew nearer and Cedric could see why the killer hadn't died when he had shot him; the assassin was a cybernetic organism, a cyborg with an electronic brain and heaven knew what else. There was a faint sparking coming from the back of the assassin's head, barely noticeable.

'I must have disconnected something when I shot him,' Cedric thought. He raised the knife he'd withdrawn from his back and flung it at the steadily approaching cyborg. It missed, but that wasn't the point. Cedric just wanted to distract the killer long enough to draw his gun from his holster.

The pain in his back was growing worse and his vision was beginning to blur and fog. Cedric brought his other hand up to steady his aim. The cyborg, realizing what Cedric was about to do, threw the knife as Cedric fired the first few shots.

The knife struck Cedric in the right side of his chest. He emptied the magazine rapidly at the giant blur in his vision as he toppled backward.

Cedric managed to maintain consciousness long enough to turn on the alarm signal on his beeper. The would tell the PoliSec HQ of this planet he was in trouble and his location.

Gratefully darkness overwhelmed him, and Cedric sank into blissful unconsciousness.

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**Bottled War** by Chris R. DeLay

Waiting; waiting for you.  
Waiting for your love.  
I must hold off my feelings,  
Become numb for eternity.

It's easy to say forever,  
When you take your life day to day.  
But should the hands of time strangle you,  
Forever is too long.

Perspectives change,  
Lives are destroyed  
When one must put a restriction on emotions.  
Is it really worth the wait?

Love is eternal;  
Forever will it be with you.  
But when it is your driving force,  
You can't stand the cold rain of impatience.

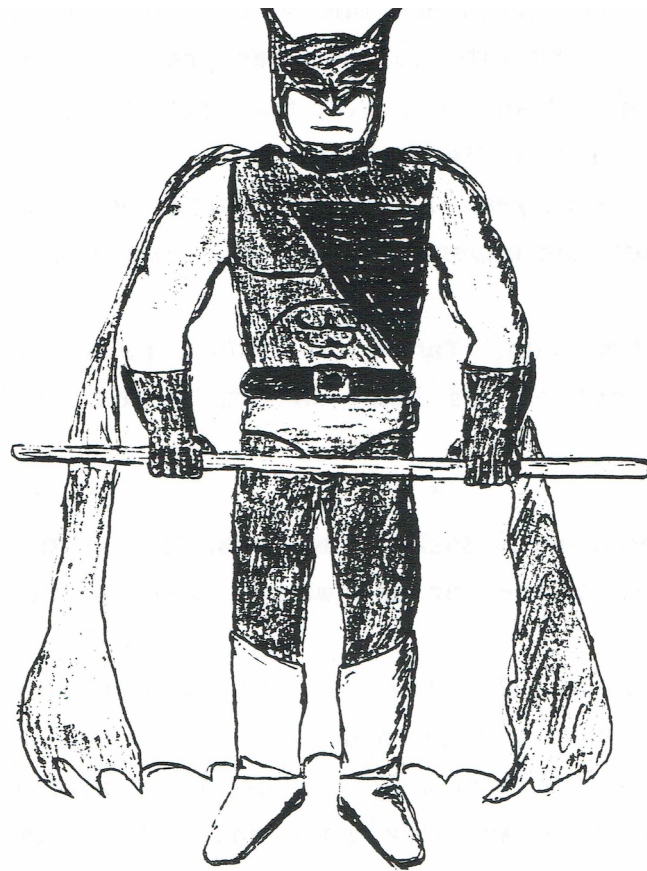
The countdown overpowers life itself;  
It crushed all happiness and hope.  
The world ceases to function,  
Nothing else matters.

Time has passed.  
It will pass again.  
But for me, time is an unconquerable mountain.

## Second Thought

by Kelly Ballance

Sun setting on an ocean of fire,  
Young children playing in the sprinkler,  
A wink and A smile,  
all pleasant to look upon.  
read in a book  
drawn on paper  
all to be remembered  
so special  
so secret  
you wonder if there is a place for you in all this  
you wonder if it would be better if you were on your own  
but you are not.  
this is something to be grateful for,  
all this love. here you don't see the darker side  
the black side of this place where we dwell  
you can't take care of your own problems  
you only think of yourself  
but there are, others you know there are others who need much  
more and much less than what you are so blessed to have. The  
sad  
thing is that you don't even consider these thing privileges. No.  
Instead  
you complain that you have a horrendous water bill,  
you aren't happy that you have water at all.  
Well if you consider it such a burden then live without it for a  
while. Live like those that you pass on the street, those that you  
walk by and don't even give a second thought, those that might deserve more than you have, those who are cold  
and hungry have no way to feed or support themselves. You aren't trying to help, no matter what you claim. You  
are trying to push these 'sight sores' from yourself. You selfish monster. If you only knew what it was like...  
I wonder if you would change, I wonder if you'd decide to save that quarter, that dime, that nickel, that you were  
going to spend on a candy bar and keep it for that next time you might buy a shower or the next time you decide  
you need to eat. I wonder if you would decide to look on the bright side of things instead of focusing on where  
your next meal was going to be. Would these things concern you? I think they might. The point is that these  
things should make a difference NOW. Now when you have the funds to help others that are less off than you.  
Now when you can donate time and love to those who need it. Now it's the time for the difference. Now is the  
time to MAKE A CHANGE!!!!



DARK HAWKE

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## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF INFINITY

by Damon Brice

### Chapter One

It was an exceptionally ordinary day. He had got up at an average time, went to his normal classes, and went to a normal track practice. He talked to the same people he talked to every day, ate the same breakfast, put the same cat out, and watched the same rerun sitcoms. It was even raining, which was particularly normal for that time of year. Ian was bored.

Ian led what he considered to be a normal life. He wasn't especially tall or muscular, nor was he particularly athletically inclined. His green eyes betrayed a fair intelligence, while his nondescript brown hair fell in coils to his shoulders. At a glance he was less than impressive in his Gotcha shirt, black jeans, and BK high tops.



It wasn't that Ian wasn't happy with his life, or that he had a lot of problems; he was simply fed up with the daily routine which seemed to fill his life day in and day out. Ian was the sort of person to do something about a problem as soon as he figured out what it was. He did, however, have the rather annoying habit of not thinking things all the way through. Thus it was that at 1:00 a.m. a solitary figure left a note on his pillow and slipped silently and dextrously out of an upstairs window, losing his tenuous grip on the trellis and falling in a pile of compost.

Had the barking of the neighbor's dog been any louder, writing would have ceased here. Ian beat a hasty retreat around the side of the house however, and the general peace of the neighborhood was restored. Ian's first idea had been to take the car, but two pertinent facts prevented this. First, the engine noise would probably have woken his father up, and second his keys were laying on his dresser. He got on his bike, muttered about the seat being soaked, and pedaled into the slackening rain.

Two truths made themselves clear after about an hour of riding in no certain direction; he still didn't know exactly where he wanted to go, and it wasn't very exciting alone anyway. To put an end to the latter problem, he determined to pay a visit to Derik, who just might have a solution to problem number one.

Derik was one of those over-achievers that made most normal people sick to their stomachs. A four-point student, cross country and track team captain, etc. His form was slim, and he was tall enough to be impressive to most people. His eyes seemed to change color, and he wore his dark hair long in the back.

As Ian had suspected, the light in Derik's bedroom was still on. As he approached the window, the sound of Guns N' Roses' new album drifted to his ears through the rain which was by now merely a light mist- The curtain was halfway up, and the digital clock on the dresser by Derik's computer read 2:27. Derik sat in his red spandex and AC/DC t-shirt with his back to the window, typing furiously on his computer. Ian tapped on the window to get Derik's attention.

At first Derik didn't notice, but when he finally heard the sound he jumped about a foot out of his chair and grabbed his baseball bat. Ian thought he looked quite comical standing there with a Louisville Slugger, but when Derik finally figured out who it was he wasn't nearly as amused.

Derik opened the window. "What is this?" he asked. "The last time you showed up at this hour was for a rather unproductive fishing trip, and I don't have time for this right now, because I have a term paper due tomorrow, and a calc--"

"Hold on," Ian broke in. "Don't you even want to hear what I'm doing?"

"Not particularly. Do you even know what you're doing?"

"Well, no...I thought you might have an idea, actually."

Derik looked at him, wondering whether or not to call the men in little white suits. "Should I call the, men in little white suits?" he asked.

"Funny. Did you write that one?"

Derik ignored that.

"If you did have an idea of what you were doing, what would it be?"

"I'm not sure," Ian replied. "I just feel like I need a break from reality, that's all."

"I can relate to that."

"So are you coming or what?"

"Do we know where we're going yet?"

"No."

Derik smiled. "Let me grab some stuff."

Twenty minutes later Derik crawled out his bedroom window with a backpack slung over one shoulder. He had left a fairly detailed note for his parents: "Don't worry; just off with Ian." Under the circumstances it pretty much said it all.

With a bit more stealth than Ian had managed, Derik retrieved his bike from behind the garage, and the two pedaled off in a random direction, which happened to be east. They rode in silence for the better part of five minutes.

"Are we going into the swamp?" Derik asked.

"I thought you were leading, but why not?" Ian replied.

## Chapter Two

As they continued to ride, the road turned to gravel and the trees grew closer and closer around them. Finally the road became dirt and then a twisting trail winding through encroaching undergrowth. The smell of

stagnant water drifted to their nostrils along with the other smells of the swamp. The creaking of frogs and the chirping of crickets gave an eerie life to the surroundings, informing all visitors they weren't alone.

The marsh wasn't alien to the two companions; they had camped here many times, fishing the many pools and streams which filled the area. They knew all the trails (they thought,) and could safely navigate them under just about any conditions. They chose the paths which took them deep into the wetland. The trail soon grew faint, and was under several inches of water more often than not.

They eventually reached a small rise where they had camped before, and in the gray dawn they stopped to rest. They pitched the tent which Derik had brought, then laid down inside it to sleep. The air remained free of conversation for at least thirty seconds.

"Indians used to hunt this land," Ian started.

"I know. We have the same conversation every time we camp out here," came Derik's reply.

"I have a different thought this time. What if we found some artifacts, or even an ancient village?"

"Get real. This place was probably gone over with a fine-toothed comb by anthropologists."

"I'm not so sure. Why don't we go deeper into the swamp tomorrow and check it out?"

"Why not?" Derik said. "After all, this was supposed to be a break from reality, and hanging out with you in a creepy swamp is about as unreal as you can get."

Derik rolled over and started to drift off to sleep, muttering under his breath about something Ian didn't quite catch, except for the words "ridiculous and ludicrous..."

In the morning (which came much too soon for the boys' taste,) Derik and Ian took down the tent and packed it in the backpack. Derik tied some fishing line he had brought to the end of a branch, caught a grasshopper, and after several failed attempts proceeded to catch a large bass. This ill-fated fish became their breakfast, and after they ate they began their journey along the trail into the swamp.

The trail soon narrowed, then became nonexistent. The ground was firm and dry, to the astonishment of Derik and Ian. There were occasional pools of still water, and the trees loomed high overhead, allowing little sunlight to reach the ground. The sounds of the swamp became the sounds of a forest, and instead of the drone of insects the singing of birds filled the air.

"This is weird," Derik said. "This should be swamp, not forest."

"I know," Ian replied. "I wonder why this is here."

The undergrowth thickened and the two were forced to lock their bikes to a tree and proceed on foot. The ground became rocky about a mile further and the trees thinned, giving way to low scrub and bushes.

"All right," Derik said, "this is really weird."

"There's an original statement if I ever heard one," Ian said. "Is that your fun word for the week?"

"No. actually, my fun word for the week is asymptote, but that's not an adjective."

"I agree, though; this is definitely funky."

This highly productive line of thought may have continued for some time except for two events. First, they noticed what appeared to be an indian arrowhead laying on the ground. Second, they realized a bit late that they had disturbed the day-to-day life of a colony of black ants living rather nearby (or more precisely, under their feet).

"AAAGGH!" came Ian's articulate remark.

Derik's comments were slightly more formulated, but unfortunately unprintable. They put Hammer and Micheal Jackson both to shame the way they danced around. The arrowhead made it into Derik's pocket, but it wasn't foremost on either's mind at the time. Just when the better part of the ants had been removed from their clothes, the ground fell out from under Ian, and he disappeared from sight with a startled yelp.

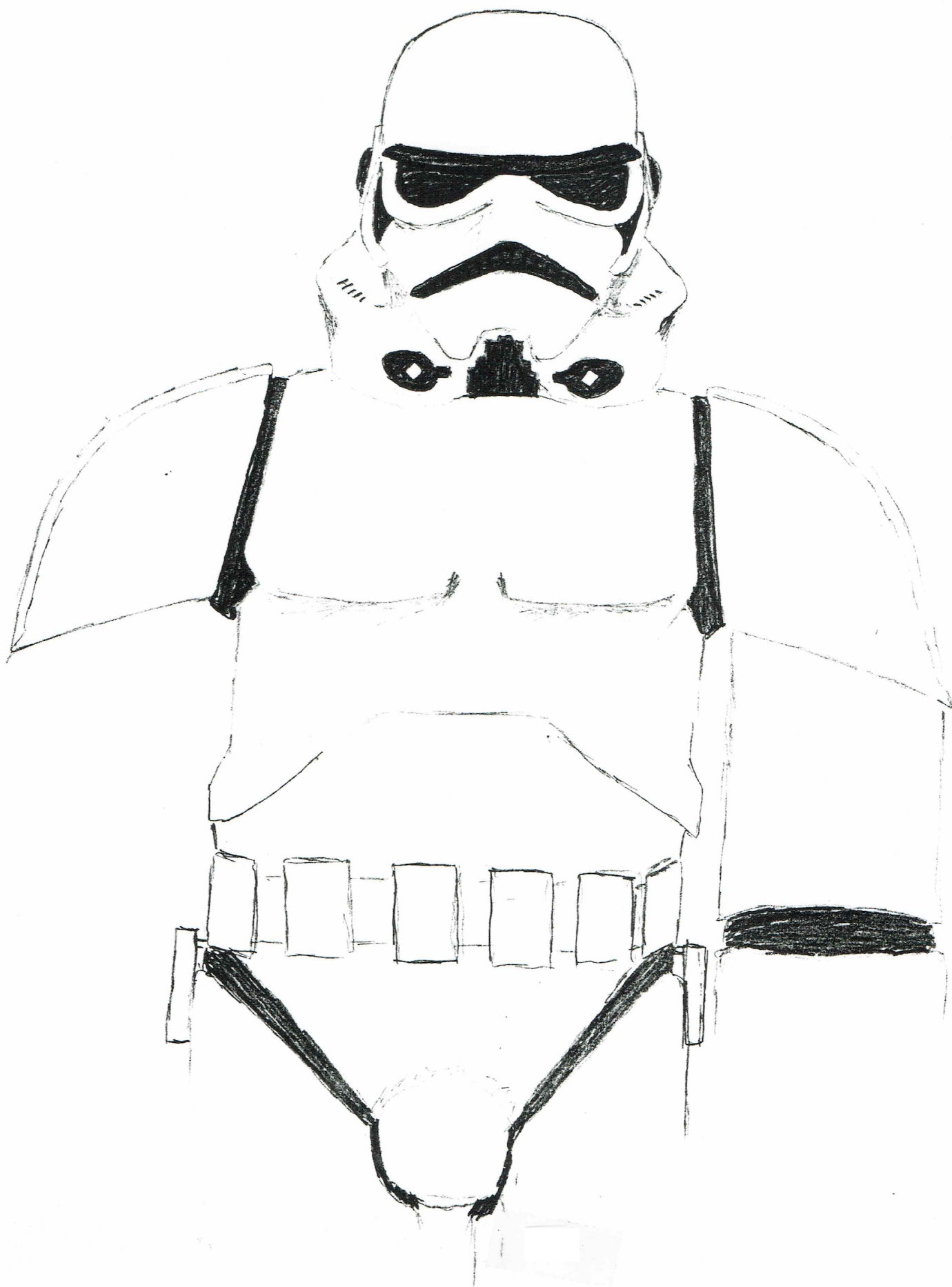
*To Be Continued...*

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## DYSASSATER

by Tim Russell

The paper cut easily using the sharp edge of the letter opener. From the style of paper Alex could tell that this one had come from a wealthy person. It was in the usual format of some anonymous person wanting me to do their dirty work.





“Hundred-thousand... not too bad,” he muttered to himself. He had been paid more but these were hard times and one would have to take money anywhere he could get it. The story with this one was pretty funny. The guy in the condo above this person had an affair with his first and his second wife.

“Now where do I go? I hate figuring this out. Uhh... 18768... no... uhh 7681... no... 18687. Yea, that’s it, yea. All right, I think I’m getting over this.”

Alex continued to study the paper for a few more moments and then began to get ready to go to work.

“Good thing I cleaned my gun. Wanna make this a quick one.” With a few more quick movements he put on his black jacket, picked up his case and stepped out the door.

\* \* \*

“This is it, 78681... no... no... 18687... yea... yea. I’m getting over this, I know I am.” He jumped out of the car and walked casually into the building where his job was waiting.

“O.k., apt number 32... no... 23. I got it,” he thought to himself. “Now, it’s a little early and I still have a little to do.”

He climbed the stairs to the second floor where the apartment was located and ducked into a janitorial closet and locked the door behind himself. He took out the hand gun that he had used many times before, and looked at it lovingly before he screwed the self-made silencer onto the barrel. He checked the new laser sight on the bottom to see if it was working properly.

“Boy, if I had that before I probably wouldn’t have screwed up so much before.” In his mind he knew that it was a lie, but he wanted to make himself believe that he wasn’t sick. Not that killing people for money isn’t sick.

“It’s time,” Alex thought. He crept into the hall close to the door marked with the number “23.”

“Boy, is that this guy’s unlucky number. Bet he’d give up the women if he knew this was coming.”

Inside Alex could hear a man yelling half of a conversation but he was so psyched he really didn’t pay attention to it.

“... I hate you!!! ... I wish you were dead. I’ll bet my wife still loves me!! She’ll come back to me when you’re gone! You’ll be gone soon, just you wait!!” The sound of a phone receiver being slammed into a wall followed.

Alex slowly twisted the door knob, surprised that it wasn’t locked and slipped in. He could hear the sounds of a man stomping around the room grumbling to himself.

“Boy, will he be sorry. He’ll pay,” the man grumbled.

Alex decided it was as good a time as any since he could see the man’s shadow and could tell where he was.

Quickly he leaped out from the corner and deftly grabbed the man by the throat so he couldn’t make any noise and hit him over the head with the pommel of the gun and knocked him out. He stood back a bit, so not to get blood on himself, put the red dot from the laser on the back of the man’s neck and pulled the trigger. A small noise came from the gun because of the silencer. The bullet sped through the air directly on target, and struck the base of the man’s skull. The bullet used, a hollow point, is made to spread apart on contact and this one was no exception. Blood and chunks of bone splattered all over, even into the white kitchen where the red of the blood made wondrous designs that one would think to find in a modern art gallery.

Stepping back from the grizzly scene, Alex bent down and picked up the shell from the bullet fired, and started to move to the door. He took one more look at the body, who’s blood was making a pool that went under the ‘frigerator and surrounded the half food bowl of the man’s pet.

Making sure no one was around he made his way out of the building and back to his car.

“All right! I did it without a problem. This is grea... Damn!!!!!!” He just recalled the telephone conversation he had heard. “NO!!! NO NO NO!!!!!!”

He dug into his pocket to the piece of paper with the apartment number on it.

“18687 Richards Ave, Apt 32.”

“NO NO NO,” he screamed. Along with the paper was a receipt from his doctor for therapy for dyslexia.

“DAMN DAMN DAMN DAMN DAMN,” he screamed and he pounded his head onto the steering wheel. “NO NO NO NO NO NNNNNNOOOOOO!”

There's so mething wrong with my computer!

Yesterday i came home from school & was raining the  
computer was on the fire it kept printing the  
message---

#####

*I tried to decipher the message but all I succeeded in  
doing was to stop the printing and change the font.  
This was the second time this week. I had to change the  
font back.*

That was better. This was getting out of hand. Last week my fridge  
started spitting ice cubes at me and the week before that my car chased  
me for a mile. Not that I minded the exercise, but I couldn't live without a  
computer. How would I play Pac-Man?

I decided to go to see a doctor. He set me straight. I had a rare  
disease called Melnomondocraniumaldistian (very rare). To put it simply,  
machines hated me. The only way to cure it was to go home and apologize  
to all my machines.

when I went home my wordprocessor was screwed  
up again. I apologized for punching the  
keys too hard and it was still.

Well, now everything's back to normal. There's just one problem- on  
my street, there lives a woman who has seven dogs. On my way home from  
school, they all start chasing me.....

THE END

IM

LAPEY

## **When Men Go Buggy II: The Continuing Adventures Of Jimmy, The Smelly Little Insect**

*Who Should Have Quite Enough Written About Him Already, But We're Bored And Need Something To Do To Pass The Time... Besides... The Title Is More Interesting If It's Longer... And Haven't You Had Enough With Short Titles Anyway... I Know We Have... <SMACK!> Okay, I'll Shut Up Now.*

by Austin Rich

Once upon a time there was an infinite inky black nothingness that filled just about all of everything that anyone could ever imagine, and then some. This black nothingness existed by itself for, well, about an eternity, at which time a little white speck of somethingness appeared in this infinite black nothingness. Supposedly, the white speck of somethingness was actually a large chunk of somethingness. But whether it was big or small is really kind of moot, because it exploded and things haven't been the same since. For one, that white somethingness turned out to be the entire universe. For another, life began to develop in this universe. Had the second thing not happened, the first would have never needed to. But it did, and all Hell broke loose.

One major problem that most of these living entities had was their tendency to believe that they are the only beings in the universe. And by the time they find out they aren't, well, let's just say the planet isn't a nice place to visit when it's covered in a nuclear winter. So, for about ten or twelve billion years, most planets spent their time debating whether or not the other planets exist when they're doing the same thing only in reverse.

Eventually, (exactly how long no one ever wants to calculate because it was a big enough headache doing it in the first place) the major planets in the universe became aware of each other, and began to find more constructive things to do like fight over the ownership of Beta Arland VI. So, with interstellar space travel an everyday occurrence, pretty much all of the universe was explored, documented, fought over, and destroyed after a million or so years.

However, there were two planets that, by some amazing coincidence, no sane planet ever wanted to visit. Their reason: "Those (beeping) son of a (beeps) are so (beeping) stupid they still (beep) when (beep) the (beeping) (beep)!!!!"

Anyway, these two planets were, thereafter, rarely visited and not much of anything ever happened on them. At least, nothing anyone ever found out about. And considering the fact that the first planet is sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo boring, and sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo many other stories exist about it1, we'll talk about the other one instead.

Sooooooooooooooooooooo:


Once upon a time there was a little itty bitty planet that was unnamed because, for one thing, no one ever named it because, for another thing, it was too small for anyone to care. However, the planet that the little itty bitty planet orbited was of much more importance, because it actually had what passes for intelligent life in the universe.

On this planet, the intelligent life began to do what most "civilized" cultures would: build a government. So, with a "government" running the planet the exact opposite of how the people wanted it run, the planet began to "prosper" and "thrive" like most other planets had in the past. However, this planet had one thing that all the other planets didn't (which really makes this story a whole hell of a lot easier to write, as well as purposeful): a smelly little man named Jimmy.

Jimmy grew up just like all the other people from planet Neon did, which was interesting because he lived on Darenak. But, regardless of how he grew up, Jimmy's life still ended up in the place it was destined to: the garbage. He was kicked out of his house, bankrupt, and unemployed. Considering that most employers will hire you if you have a pulse, this lends proof to the theory that Jimmy was either exceptionally smelly, or clinically dead. Entire research facilities were trying to determine which, but since Jimmy smelled rather poorly they spent the money in other, even less constructive ways.

Whether or not Jimmy had a life worth living was unimportant, because Jimmy had a feeling that he was destined for greatness. And this was true, but no one, even the truly intelligent beings in the universe, knew it. Jimmy decided that since he was destined for greatness, he had better soon find out why he was. And to do that, Jimmy set out to go on a perilous, treacherous, and generally unsafe quest to find Xed Xuget, a distant relative of a Rock-n-Roll star on a faraway planet<sup>1</sup>, who knew the secrets of the universe, and administrations as well.

Xed, as the legend goes, was around since the beginning of Darenak culture, who was supposedly the man that sang the songs that kept the Darenakian society alive when it was first coming into existence. In recent times however, the more "civilized" Darenakians have given up these childish myths. But Jimmy had recently found a

smashed space craft that would prove otherwise. The craft, which had the word NASA<sup>2</sup> on it, contained a small piece of writing which, if you read it backwards at slow speed and only pronounced every other letter, recorded it, then played that backwards at seven billion decibels on a frequency close to pi megahertz, it sounds like a John Lennon song being played diagonally at very fast speed (which is possible on the newer versions of record players). As Jimmy had learned through reliable sources, the Beatles toured with Eric Clapton, who at one time had a concert in the U.S.S.R. Stalin, as Jimmy found out, was a czar of the U.S.S.R. who, in an unauthorized journal published in a magazine called the National Enquirer, said he saw a space craft one night that said, on the side, “” which translates to, “Looking For The Meaning Of Existence? Come To Xed Xuget’s Intergalactic Palm Reading Palace On Beta Arland III,” in a language that has been dead for nearly three billion years.

With this piece of vitally important information that Jimmy had picked up, (exactly how he got it is still shrouded in mystery) Jimmy was positive that if he could get hold of Xed, then he could find out why he was destined for greatness. However, the “government” of Darenak didn’t even know how to contact alien life forms, let alone pilot a craft that could take you to one. So right then and there Jimmy’s dangerous quest came to what looked like a screeching halt (but that’s what everyone else thought).

Jimmy, however, was bound and determined to be destined for greatness and, however uninteresting it was to anyone else, devised a plan (But then again, what else is new?).

Jimmy thought that alien life forms are like any other kind (how wrong is was is something that not only intelligent life forms are able to fathom). In other words, do something to get their attention and they respond by investigating. And if he could get them (as in some alien life forms) to investigate something on, say, his planet, then just maybe he could hitch a ride with them to Beta Arland III.

The only problem with this otherwise semi-brilliant plan was how on Darenak do you get an alien life form's attention when he couldn't care less if you actually existed?

Well, for starters you put up a really, really big sign saying, “ATTENTION ALL ALIEN LIFE FORMS! Please Come To Darenak And Pick Up A Smelly Little Guy Named Jimmy. He Really Needs A Ride To Beta Arland III.” When that doesn’t work, then you offer free eats and drinks. Then, if that still doesn’t work, which it never does, then you try more drastic measures. Like, say, blowing up your planet.

Fortunately, for Jimmy's and many other people's sakes, a group of aliens were, by some strange coincidence, investigating the itty bitty planet that was orbiting Darenak. They witnessed Darenak's explosion and, since they happened to be in an organization dedicated to rescuing explosion victims, saved the people in the city Clothtown at ground zero of the explosion.

Little did anyone know, but this entire incident was the focal point for just about all the very important things in the known universe. A sound from the explosion was caught in a temporal and spatial warp, not only triggered a thought in a man on Earth on how to leave his planet if need be, but gave him an incredible idea for a new kind of sound for a band that could be called *Burnt-Out Acid-Brain, Fluorescent Light Bulb Fixtures And Friends*. This explosion also created a god. This god was supposedly unnamed, but in fact did have a name, and never really did much of anything of any importance, with the sole exception of creating a breed of completely immortal insects, of which all but one died. Considering that they were supposed to be immortal, the fact that they did indeed die led to the re-thinking of the whole god business anyway, after which he took a very long holiday on Beta Arland III as the financial advisor for Xed Xuget himself.

However, the universal effects of this incident were in no way as coincidental as some of the short term ones. For example, Jimmy had been rather stupid during the moment of the explosion. He had originally intended to stay in Ragsburg, a town on the exact opposite side of the planet, during the actual explosion to avoid fatal harm to himself. However, he forgot that Ragsburg is actually connected to another town caught in a permanent spatial vortex because of an unfortunate accident with the whole space/time structure of the universe on the part of the aforementioned god during the creation of a certain black hole used by a certain smelly little insect. In short, Ragstown just happens to be connected to Clothtown.

Another example of immediate and short term coincidences connected to the explosion involves two people rescued from Clothtown. Because of their being saved from an explosion, two people from Darenak, Kurt and Fred, decided that the aliens that picked them up had the right idea in life. All living beings do not have to be put through such torture that they almost had to go through. And it was then and there that Kurt and Fred began a





non-profit organization called Kurt & Fred's Explosion Victim And Space Salvage Corporation. They vowed to start it on the next planet they landed on, and using some of the new technology the rest of the universe had to offer, they would travel through time and rescue explosion victims and allow them to live on the planet that they were going to set this corporation up on. And, true to form, they did just that. It was about twenty years later, after plenty of saving they decided to take a break from it and start salvaging on an itty bitty planet orbiting a planet that they just couldn't remember the name of, but were sure that it really wasn't important in the long run so they wouldn't think about it, and at an amazingly coincidental time of right before its explosion. And, because they were not at all prepared for this, they merely picked up the people from the city at ground zero.

The third immediate coincidence had nothing to do with anyone else in the universe of any importance. Fred & Kurt set up their corporation on Beta Arland III.

It took quite a while for Jimmy to piece together all of what had happened in the last few hours, and when he finally did he had more headaches and confusion than he did to start out with. However, none of that was important to him, because he knew one thing: He was headed to Beta Arland III. So, after taking several aspirin, sleeping for about twelve hours, and waking up to find he was already there, Jimmy was really excited and could not wait to get to Xed Xuget's Intergalactic Palm Reading Palace and, unfortunately, wet himself.

As soon as Jimmy got off of the ship (and used some of the courtesy towels to "help" himself deal with his little problem), he went straight to the first cab he saw and got run over. However, the second cab he found could take him straight to Xed Xuget's Intergalactic Palm Reading Palace as long as Jimmy promised to give him twelve percent of all money Jimmy will ever make in his lifetime (which works out to be about exactly what a normal person would have to pay for a cab ride to anywhere anyways). Jimmy, overwhelmed by the fact that, not only was he in a completely new alien environment that was (or if not, then worse) just like his own planet, but that he was also on Beta Arland III, said yes. The wisdom of Jimmy's decision to pay the cab driver has, at least now, been regarded as the most in the current known universe.

Jimmy rushed to Xed Xuget's Intergalactic Palm Reading Palace and found what he had almost dreaded the entire time he tried to get here: a loooooooooooooooooong line. The line to get in to have Xed read your palm was almost as long as the lines to get tickets to a Xed Xuget concert. However, Jimmy did not care. He decided that no matter what the odds were, no matter how long he would have to wait, he would have Xed read his palm and have him tell him why he was destined for greatness.

Jimmy kept that attitude for what seemed like twelve long years, (which was actually eleven years and eleven months) until he finally was admitted entrance to Xed's palace.

Xed and Jimmy got right down to basics.

"What brings you here, my high paying and yet poor smelling client?" asked Xed.

"I have come to see you and ask you the question that has been plaguing me for many, many years and has forced me to risk life and limb to see you," spaked Jimmy in his most solemn voice.

"And what question might that be my dear, hopefully rich friend?" inquired Xed.

"I want to know," with sudden inflection in his voice, "why I have felt, all my life, that I am destined for greatness and, if this is true, what that greatness might be."

Xed stared at Jimmy just long enough to tell that he could make additional money on him if he played his cards right.

"You, my friend, *are* destined for greatness. In fact, you are the one being that the universe has been looking for in all its existence. You are the one that can do the one thing that no one else has been able to for the universe's entire history."

Jimmy stared in awe. He always thought, but he never knew it could be that good. "What is it I can do?" he asked very eagerly.

"You can," and Xed paused then for dramatic purposes, "make people understand exactly what to do to make themselves completely and totally happy." Xed spaked that last line with great confidence, wondering if Jimmy would buy it. However, it didn't matter what Xed thought, because it turned out that every word of what Xed spaked, whether he knew it or not, was true.

Jimmy let his mouth hang open as he heard this.

"Thank you very much for visiting. Have a nice day," and Xed quickly showed Jimmy to the financial advisor where Jimmy signed the rest of his natural life away.

Jimmy had about twelve minutes left before he had to work off his debt to Xed, and decided to spend it running wildly down the streets saying, "I was right! I was destined for greatness!" However, had Jimmy reflected



on his current situation he probably wouldn't have been very happy. For one, he had to do manual labor for Xed to pay off his enormous debt to Xed. In addition to that, Jimmy had to give twelve percent of that money to the cab driver that drove him to Xed in the first place. So, according to the economist that, by some amazing coincidence, is Xed's financial advisor (who was also getting quite annoyed with all the work he was having to do, and therefore promptly quite afterward to pursue a career in golf), Jimmy will be working for about forty more years. Fortunately, Jimmy had no time to reflect on this and therefore was able to use his own power on himself so that when he was killed right then, he died very, very happy.

It appeared that a smelly little insect named, coincidentally, Jimmy, had decided to destroy the universe before he went back in time to learn why he couldn't understand the concept of a name. However, Jimmy (the insect), being the unintelligent smelly little *persistent* insect he is, mistook Jimmy (the man... or at least, humanoid) for the entire universe and killed him instead.

(To make sure that all corners of this story are covered, it must be stated why Jimmy [the man] had made a wise decision in agreeing to pay the cab driver. The cab driver, since Jimmy couldn't pay his debt being dead, decided that the cab business is completely for losers. He, along with all other cab drivers, quit their jobs because of this, and a new breed of cab drivers took over the job. These new cab drivers were actually kind, not at all rude, and charged you the correct amount it cost to take a person from point A to point B. This led to Cab Driver Appreciation Day, and other great things people enjoyed doing involving cheese, and the universe as a whole was just slightly happier because of Jimmy's decision. It should also be noted that the aforementioned god had absolutely nothing to do with since, because he resumed his duties as a god after quitting working for Xed, therefore went back to inter-connecting all of everything with itself for the purposes of an interesting... yet confusing story [and through circumstance yet unrevealed, seemed to improve his golf game].)

As disappointing as this story may seem, its moral has still yet to be revealed for those who haven't already destroyed their copy of it out of frustration.

In this vast and random expanse of nothingness we call "the universe," it is very important to remember that one person can please some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time. However, if there is someone who can please all of the people all of the time, there would be nothing to fight over, would there?

This is why a certain god we are all familiar with set into motion the chain of events that killed poor, happy, little (and smelly) Jimmy.

In other words, the universe would be a whole lot happier if that god had just butted out.

However, a little bit never hurt. After all, that cab thing came of it.

The End (I think?)

1 The planet in question is thought to be Neon, though this text was discovered incomplete, so we are not quite sure.

2 This is not to be confused with the National Aeronautics Space Administration, because in other parts of the universe NASA is defined as, "A rather annoying paper clip that has fallen completely out of reach of the person who dropped it." Why this was printed on a space craft really has no relevant purpose in the telling of the story, but makes for a nice conversational piece. <sup>3</sup>

3 Strangely Enough, this footnote was written by the author, not me.

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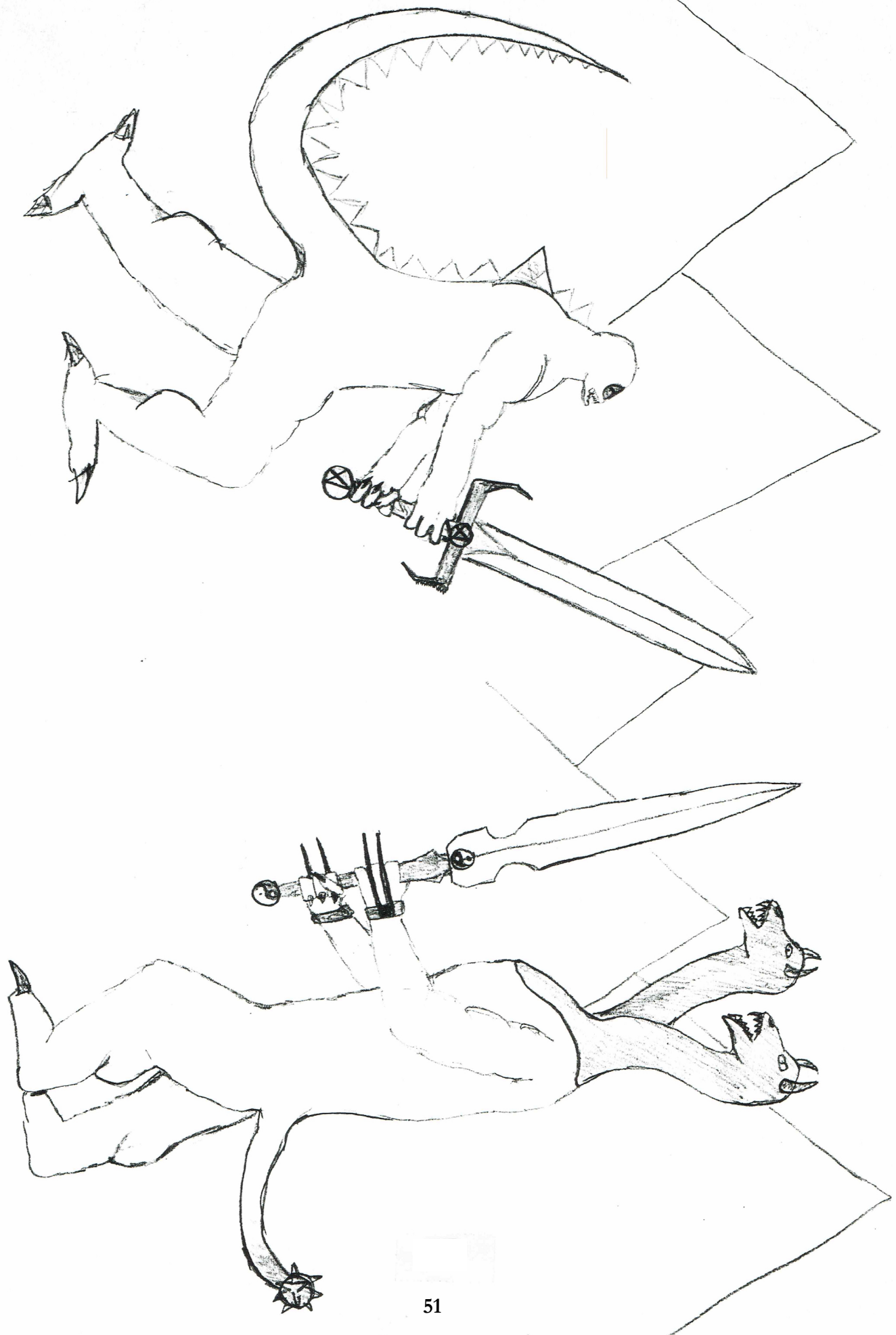
## A Bit of Advice

by Blake Owens

You know, life never really was designed to be fair. It's so full of twists and turns, ups and downs, and good & bad luck that you really have to wonder if it's all worth it. Well... WHO CARES!!!!

If you analyze everything that goes on in your life every day, it will drive you completely nuts! Going, "Man, that could have been better," or, "This day really sucks!" can really frazzle your nerves if you keep it up long enough.

Live for today, my dear reader. If you live for tomorrow, it's just going to end up hurting you. Wasting time is one of the worst things you can do to yourself, especially with the way this planet is right now. The world might end tomorrow. Make the most of today. Be spontaneous! Why not a little crazy? I'm not saying you should do something like jump off a twelve-story building into a bathtub filled with green Jell-O (though that would be





cool to watch), but experience the world. Don't be afraid to try out new things. Life is way too short to waste. Use it. That's what it's there for.

You know, it's true what they say (whoever "they" are): Life is what you make it. Now if you'll excuse me, I think I'll call up some of my friends. For some reason, I'm in the mood to party.

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### **Life**

by Josh Minter

It comes and goes as do the waves.  
    sometimes too quickly.  
    it is gone.  
Yet for some it never seems to end.  
I can pass before your eyes,  
    like the flash of light.  
    If is freely given,  
    yet is costly to take.  
It is the most precious gift,  
    yet we waste it in war.

### **Endless Conflict: Bottled War II**

by Chris R. DeLay

He defies me.  
    “What are you going to do?” He says to me.  
I break down, realizing how hopeless a battle with Time is.  
    I cry.

I will win, but it will be an earned victory.  
He does not believe in losing for the benefit of his opponent.  
    I must continually wage war with a force of nature.  
God has put forth a servant to show this master how feeble I am.

It humbles me, but all the while \_I plot his downfall.  
    He drags his feet, going no faster than required.  
    This inability to speed him up drives me insane.  
The little voices keep telling me how to speed him up.  
    I will not snap.

I feel his presence even now, yet I defy him.  
I refuse to give his twisted little mind the satisfaction of seeing me admit defeat.

This war is limited, it only afflicts me.  
    It makes me do something I can't wait.  
My world is always in motion; nothing remains the same for long,  
    Except my longing for love.  
To stop my world because of it seems easy.  
Unfortunately, I've got to hold my world still, too.  
    I can't, but must, last.  
    I will prevail.

**Ten Days in the Life of a Love-Struck Teenager**  
**(A Twisted Modern-Day Romeo and Juliet)**

by Rebecca Leichner

Jan 8 -

You'll never believe what's been going on! I've had an AWFUL day! It all started when my alarm went off this morning, and it's just gone downhill from there.

At 6:30, my alarm went off, and it was VERY loud. Now, I don't know about you, but I absolutely HATE loud alarms. I had it set at a particular volume, and wouldn't ya' know it, sometime last night my pesky little sister went in my room and started pressing buttons and turning dials.

I'll never understand her. She's eight, but my parents treat her like she's six. She can get away with anything, and she knows it - trust me.

So I got up grouchy. My sister's school had the day off - conferences or something - and as I walked down the hall and saw her snoozin' away, I just wanted to scream - I just knew it was gonna' be a bad day.

I remembered I forgot to dry the jeans I washed last night, so I threw them in the dryer, then I went to take a shower... Take a wild guess - NO HOT WATER. Ever since dad started working the graveyard shift, he comes home at 6:00 in the morning, takes a shower, and goes to bed. He sleeps like a bear in hibernation. I haven't had a hot shower in two days, so I'm gettin' used to it by now. At least I don't have to worry about being lulled back to sleep by the hot, steamy, water. I got out of the shower and took my jeans out of the dryer.

I went to my room and got dressed as usual, then I walked out to my bus stop, and almost slipped off the front porch steps - there was definitely ice on this twenty-seven degree morning. I reached the bus stop, just in time to see the bus disappear around the bend.

Now I was really pissed.

I had a choice ... I could either wake up my dad and make him take me to school - then he'd be mad at me for a week. I didn't think I could handle another lecture from dad - the last one I got was two days ago. He said I was being "too argumentative" with my mom - I AM SOO SURE!!! She started it in the first place!

So - I could wake up dad or call Jeff and have him pick me up... I settled for calling Jeff. We've been going out for ... eight months as of January 17th. I called Jeff's house, but - just my luck, he was already gone. It wasn't until now that I remembered he had to go in early and retake his pre-calculus test. So I went in and woke up dad. He yelled at me, and gave me the "You need to give yourself enough time to get ready in the morning" speech. Thank God we only live ten minutes from the school.

I got to school four minutes before the bell rang, and went to where Jeff was supposed to be taking his test, but he wasn't there. I guess he had finished early. I searched and searched for him and finally found him - but by then the bell had already rung, so I hardly got to talk to him - there went the highlight of MY morning.

Everything else was O.K., except I failed my chemistry test. Oh well, as soon as progress report time rolls around, I can get my "I can't afford to put you through college" lecture. I can hardly wait.

I AM SO STUPID - I just remembered that I forgot to mail the letter to the dean of CCC to see about scholarships. There's always tomorrow - I guess.

Then I got home. My stupid sister was just vegin' out in front of the T.V. - with six of her friends.

"Where's mom?" I asked angrily. "You are gonna get busted BIG TIME if you are caught with this many people over! You know better!"

"Oh, lay off Shelley," she said. "Mom's workin' late and Dad's already gone. You're fixin' dinner."

I came unglued. "I am not cooking dinner for you and the rest of the Brady Bunch! I've got a date with Jeff, and I'm gonna go take a hot shower for once and get ready. I really hope Mom comes home soon so you'll be grounded for a month!" I had to say it, even though I knew it would never happen. After my outburst, I headed upstairs. Which is where I am now, and I'm trying to cool off but I only have two hours to get ready, so I'm gonna quit writing cuz I have absolutely no idea what I'm gonna wear.

Jan 9...

Hello again. I give up. I just don't know what to do about Jeff. I think he's mad at me, but he won't tell me why.

That flirt Jennifer Chambers is always hanging around him, and it's really beginning to bug me. I mean, he talks to HER more than he talks to me. Another thing - I've only got one class with him---Chemistry. (Imagine

that!) Jennifer and Jeff have THREE classes together. She's liked Jeff since third grade, and if she tried to take him away, she's gonna be in very hot water ... she just has a way with her "charm". I'm gonna talk to her about it - I think I'll just call her - heck - since I'm gonna talk to HER, I might as well call Jeff, and find out just exactly what on EARTH is going on ... if I can't talk on my own boyfriend...

Jan 10-

Finally Friday. It's about stinkin' time. I called Jeff last night, and found out why he was mad at me. You'll never believe this ... Jennifer Chambers told him that the reason I didn't get to school til' late Wednesday morning was because I got a ride with Bryan Smith. Bryan and Jeff used to be best friends - the ride part wasn't the bad part. THE STUPID PART is - she said she saw us parked. I couldn't believe it! He said later that he felt awful for not talking to me about it. I was hurt too - still am a little, but all is forgiven. We're going out tonight... to the movies - I don't know what we're gonna see, and I really don't care. It's not like we're really gonna watch it. Just one more week before our eight month anniversary. He says we're going "someplace special".

I'm really excited. I really don't know what I'd do if I ever lost him.

Jan 13-

This was the BEST day I've had in a long time! Jeff picked me up and took me to school. We were walking around, when good ol' Jennifer walked up behind he (she's been gone for a few days), and said, "Hi Jeff!" Jeff hadn't had a chance to talk to her about lying about me. He stopped dead in his tracks - I guess he knew her voice. He turned around and looked her square in the eyes. He said, "So Jenn - I hear you're going out with Bryan Smith."

"No I'm Not!" she said quickly. "Where'd ya hear that?"

"Shellie told me - it's the truth, ain't it?"

She turned bright red and said, "No!! I can't believe she'd lie to you like that!!" Then Jeff said somethin' REALLY cool - he goes, "Why not, Jennifer? You did!"

Then we turned around and walked the other way. Rumor has it she showed up late to first period, and she'd obviously been crying. I hope she learned HER lesson!

Progress reports are coming in a few days. Dad's still being a major pain. He's always yelling at me for stupid stuff. Now he says I'm not being smart by going out with Jeff. He says I'm getting "too attached." That's the point, isn't it? My father's a fool.

Jan 16-

Well, tomorrow's our anniversary, and I can't wait!

He finally told me where we're going to go. We're going back to The Rose restaurant. That's where we had our first date.

He's got a basketball game tonight. Jeff's drivin' himself and some of his friends up to Milner for the game. That's one thing about Jeff - he absolutely despises riding the bus. I really want to go, but Dad doesn't like Jeff. I don't care - I LOVE Jeff, and my dad might as well be talking to a brick wall.

Jan 17-

I can't believe it. On the eve of our anniversary. It was just too icy. He and his teammates. Just goofin' off in the car. He simply wasn't paying attention. He just took the corner too fast on the ice. It was just too fast. Too icy. Of all days. Eight months - almost. Too fast. Too icy. Too cold. Too icy. They won. They were coming home. Jeff was coming home to me. Our anniversary...

Later, Jan 17-

Sitting here thinking, I've made up my mind. I see the tear-stained face in the mirror, and I've made up my mind. I hear the anguished cry of pain deep within my heart, and I've made up my mind. I feel the tears rolling down my hot cheeks, and I've made up my mind. Sitting here, I see out of the corner of my eye, the metal. Grey. Black. Cold. Hard. I see this chilling tool of death, and, as the shivers roll up and down my spine, I realize what I must do. I've made up my mind.

This is the end.

Goodbye.

I'll miss you - I think.

